



POST-LOAUREATE POEMS
AND OTHER POEMS

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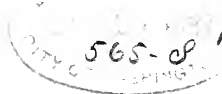
AND OTHER POEMS

BY



AUTHOR OF "A BRIEF HANDBOOK OF ENGLISH AUTHORS," "A BRIEF
HANDBOOK OF AMERICAN AUTHORS," AND EDITOR OF
"THROUGH THE YEAR WITH THE POETS"

63



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ELECTROTYPED
BY C. J. PETERS & SON, BOSTON.

To
Clinton Scollard,

TRUE POET AND LOYAL FRIEND.



*“With reed and lyre” you wake the echoes sweet
That float and linger in the halls of song.
I follow after but with lagging feet,
And do but stammer while your voice is strong.*

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Post-Laureate Idyls.



*O why in tripping rhymes relate
The legends of our nursery days?
Arthurian epics, more sedate,
Suit better with our modern ways.*

POST-LAUREATE IDYLS.

THE RAPE OF THE TARTS.

ARGUMENT.

*The Queen of Hearts,
She made some tarts
All on a summer's day ;
The Knave of Hearts,
He stole those tarts
And carried them away !
The Queen of Hearts,
She missed those tarts
And griev'd for them full sore ;
The Knave of Hearts
Brought back those tarts,
And vow'd he'd steal no more !*

ISOLT, the Cornish Queen, in those dark days
When Mark, her unlov'd lord, had brought her back
From woodland lodge where Tristram bode with her
The space of one revolving moon, but now
Was past to Brittany, where the white hands
Of one with name like hers, Isolt, had snar'd
Him with their gleam, so changeul-hearted he,
Fell into bitter musings lasting long,
And vexed thereby the sullen Mark, who growl'd
His anger from behind his tangled beard,

The more resentful that she took no heed.
So months went by, until at last there dawn'd
A summer morn on wave-washt Cornwall fair
And sweet as odorous white lilies are,
And sweet indeed to Queen Isolt, who lay
With silken broider'd hangings round her bed
Facing the morn. Far off the ripple broke
Upon the beach unheard, but flasht in air
Its silver, and in palace court the birds
Of morning sang. Then to herself the Queen :

“Lo, absent Tristram is not all in all
To me, Mark's wife. There yet abides in life
Something of worth, tho' Tristram be not here.”

The saying pleas'd her, and she turn'd it o'er.
“Something of worth, tho' Tristram be not here.”
Then rising from the couch which Mark had left
Ere rose the sun from out the Cornish sea,
She call'd her waiting maidens to their task,
And paus'd before two gowns the damsels brought,
As doubtful how she should array herself.
One of green samite, o'er which wander'd strings
Of gleaming pearls, in mazy pattern set,
So that the eye wearied to follow, held
Her but such space while one with even breath
Might count a dozen ; then her glance upon

The other fell, a silken robe of blue
Shot thro' and thro' with shimmering silver lights.
And this her choice at length for that day's wear,
Not unforgetful how Sir Tristram lov'd
To see her in it ; and, when her waiting maids
Had rob'd her, slowly mov'd she down the stair,
And, after morning hunger stay'd, she past
To where the palace cooks and scullions bode,
In kitchen vast, whence royal dainties came.
All sweetness seem'd her face, and music seem'd
Her voice, when she entreated one to bring
His cook's white apron for her royal use,
And when her maids had clad her in it, none
Could think her other than a gracious Queen,
Since nothing of her royal grace was hid.
So following her fancy's lead, she bade
The men about her bring the wheaten meal
And all the kitchen tools she glibly nam'd,
And place before her on a cross-legg'd stand
Of smoke-gloom'd oak ; and then her round white arms
She plung'd up to the elbows in the meal,
Her red lips murm'ring,

“ It will serve.”

Then, while

The cooks and scullions stood with hands on hips
And mouths agape to watch, she deftly mov'd
About her task, and not with awkwardness,

As one unus'd to kitchen toil or cares,
But with all grace, such grace as won all hearts,
And, ere they knew her purpose, saw before
Their eyes row after row of pastry moulds,
As shapely as the hands that made, and these
The Queen herself in heated oven placed,
And, while these brown'd in torrid darkness, sang, —
For sweetly could Isolt of Ireland sing:

“ Ay, ay, O ay, — the winds that fan the fire !
Fair tarts in prospect, tarts before me here !
Ay, ay, O ay, — and tarts were my desire,
And one was not enough, and one was dear :
Ay, ay, O ay, — the winds that move so fast !
And one was far, and one tart was nigher,
And one will never bake, and one will last.
Ay, ay, O ay, the winds that fan the fire !”

Far up among the oaken rafters rang
Her voice, and clear as is the tinkling fall
Of water over rocks that chafe its course,
And all within the kitchen felt such stir
Within the blood as when the joyous wire
Sweet summer music makes along the veins.
Then one, to whom she signal'd when the strain
Was ended, open threw the oven doors,
And drew from warm concealment into light

The tarts and bore them to Isolt, who straight
Within the cup-like hollow of the tarts
One after other placed with golden spoon,
On which were graven deep the Cornish arms,
The lucent jellies quivering like leaf
Of aspen when all else is still, and sound
And other motion dead within the wood.
This done she bade the cooks have careful charge
Of these, her tarts, till she should send, then past —
Her cook's white apron doft — upward to halls
Befitting her fair presence more, and, sleep
And summer both at once assailing, slept.

Now on the selfsame morning fair Etarre,
Awaking with Sir Pelleas's sword across
Her throat and Gawain's, felt her fancy turn
To him who might have slain her, sleeping, yet
Forbore because of former love, and said
To him who lay beside her, false Gawain,
“Go hence, and see me nevermore!” The Prince,
Who deem'd he knew all women's changeful ways,
Laught lightly, and essayed to kiss, as oft
Before, the warm white hollow of her throat.
But she, recoiling, flasht such sudden wrath
He, too, drew back, and slowly rose and heard
From lips grown stern, from lips his own had prest,
The sentence, “Go! and see me never more.”

Then he, much marveling on women's ways,
Obey'd, and went with slow, reluctant feet
Without, and mounted horse, and past across
The courtyard and thro' postern portal, past
Down garden slopes with musky breathings fill'd,
To where the gates, wide open, led to fields
And far beyond them forest shades. Thro' these
He went and wander'd on to where the walls
Of Mark's great palace rose across his view.
Then, for the summer noon was hot, he drew
His rein beneath a giant oak that made
A welcome shadow near the gate, and mus'd
Yet more on changeful women's ways till came
On vagrant breeze a whiff of pastry thence
And woke a sudden hunger in his breast.

Meanwhile in hall Isolt of Ireland slept,
And slumb'rous summer silence crept o'er all
The serving men and maids, till one whose care
Had been the tarts to watch, a lad in years
But few and wits as scant as years, awak'd
From dream unquiet, and awaking, saw
The Prince Gawain through kitchen gliding soft,
Bearing the great, tart-laden dish. Whereat
The lad rose, terror stricken, shrieking loud,
"The tarts." Again, and like a descant, "Gone!
The tarts."

Loud shrill'd the cry thro'out the court,
And each took up the words till rang from wall
To wall the mournful echo :

“Gone, the tarts!”

Fast swell'd the cry and louder with each voice
That wail'd the theft until the Queen awak'd
And hearing what had happ'd felt her heart sink
And visions toothsome of the well-bak'd tarts
For royal supper fade to naught, and sat
To tears abandon'd and to grief a prey.

But false Gawain to saddle leaping, tarts
In dish upborne, saw all the rabble rout
Of palace kitchen fast behind pursue,
And one in saddle follow'd while the rest
The shrill cry echo'd, “O, the tarts! the tarts!”
Forth from the gates the chase was had until
The steed of Prince Gawain stumbl'd and threw
Him, bearing still the unspill'd tarts, upon
A grassy bank where those who follow'd found
And brought him, still tart-laden, to Isolt.

Naught said Gawain to temper his disgrace,
But let his eye a moment rest upon
The Queen, an eye that many maidens lov'd,
Then fall demurely on the toothsome tarts.
Then she, mov'd somewhat by his grace and glance,

That admiration show'd, forgave the theft,
And thinking :

“Lo, a goodly man he seems
Since Tristram is not by,” upon him laid
But two conditions. First that never should
He enter kitchen more in act to steal,
And on his knee, down-dropping at her feet,
With many oaths the courteous Gawain swore
To keep from deeds like this thro' all his life ;
The next that he should stay and eat with her.
So, nothing loth, the Prince of Courtesy stay'd
And ate with her the savory, toothsome tarts
For all an incense-breathing afternoon,
Till one in haste appear'd when sank the sun,
Crying, “I crave thy pardon, Queen, thy lord
Is near.”

Thereat Gawain, warn'd by a look
Which ray'd from out her heavy-lidded eyes,
Departed with a word of farewell said,
And past to his own land, while she prepar'd
To meet King Mark returning from the chase.

AT THE PALACE OF KING LOT.

ARGUMENT.

*The King was in the parlor, counting out his money:
The Queen was in the kitchen, eating bread and honey:
The Maid was in the garden, hanging out the clothes:
There came a little Blackbird and snipp'd off her nose.*

LOT, King of Orkney in the Northern seas,
Long ere the time when, fighting sword in hand
'Gainst Arthur in the barons' wars he made
His name to all true men a byword like
A thing of scorn, one summer morning sat
Within the presence chamber all alone,
For knights and squires that made his island court,
(A tiny court rul'd by a weakling king,)
Were absent at the hunting every one.
Far better had it suited with his mood
To ride with them in gay companionship
Than to have stay'd behind. But on that day
The butcher, baker, chandler, and the host
That prosper'd on the waste and riot made
At court, their bills had brought and, clam'ring, begg'd
Their dues.

As one who from his window sees
In early morning blue and cloudless skies,
And o'er him feels the breezes blowing soft,
While in his heart is peace, but later finds
The breezes risen to a gale, and dull,
Grey clouds fast shutting out the sun and sky
And in his bosom discontent is lord ;
So was it with King Lot when from his chair,
After the morning meal which Bellicent,
His Queen, had with her maids prepar'd for him —
Since well she knew what meats would please him
best —

He fain had had risen purpose-mov'd to pass
Without, but, rising, heard a dismal noise
And saw the door burst open while a throng
Of angry debtors clos'd him round about.
Shrill rang their voices 'mong the rafters high
O'erhead, and scarce the King could headway make
Against their loud-voic'd clamor, but at length,
When they had tir'd themselves with shriekings shrill,
He spake again and all attent they heard.

“Peace, fools, and leave me time to overlook
Your bills. This done, to-morrow at this hour
The seneschal shall see that all are paid.”

This said, he wav'd his hand, and at the sign

The rout of debtors vanish'd all at once
And swift, as oftentimes a chatt'ring flock
Of sparrows disappears before the sound
Of nearing feet, so quickly drew they off,
Each man communing with himself, the while
Their sharp heels clatter'd on the flinty floor.

Then like a wrathful sunshine smil'd King Lot.
"I go not to the chase to-day, it seems,
But weary hours must spend instead, forsooth,
In balancing accounts, since in my court
Of figures none knows aught, save I, the King."

At this the sullen Modred, eldest son
Of Lot, laught softly to himself, — right glad
That any business kept the kingly eye
From him, for full of tricks and craft was he,
The Artful Dodger of an early day,
And often in an uproar set the court.

And now the knights and squires had gone without
Their King, while he, with anxious face and brow
All frown, sat 'mongst his money caskets lost
In calculations deep, and murm'ring low
Of pounds and shillings, and, at times, of pence,
And oft, for better aiming at results,
His fingers counting as do boys at school —

Like them perplex for want of fingers more —
So past his morning hours away.

Meanwhile

Had Bellicent, the Queen, her husband left,
And to the kitchen gone to oversee
The maids, for such her careful custom was.
Right bitter was her tongue when these transgress'd,
But to obedience was she all as sweet
As winds from off a perfum'd bank of flowers, —
And this her maidens knew and strove to please.
But on her brow this morn there lurkt a frown,
And in her heart reign'd vague unrest, and why
She knew not, yet she held her peace and came
And went on household quests and would have still'd
The gnawing hunger at her heart, and all
In vain.

At last she to a cupboard bent
Her steps, an oaken cupboard built within
A niche, and wisely for such purpose made,
And open threw its doors. On oaken shelf
There gleam'd the glass and silver kept for days
Of pomp and show, for Bellicent, the Queen,
Had joy in burnisht silver as became
Her state, and on her treasure gaz'd she now
With proper pride, but on the topmost shelf
Her eyes, blue as the seas that circle round

Her island realm and dash against its crags,
Espied a wheaten loaf, and, close beside,
A jar of amber honey, of some hive
The luscious spoil. Beholding these the frown
From off her brow departed, and, therewith,
The gnawing at her heart, and putting forth
A slender arm to which a broider'd sleeve,
All of red samite, clung in shapely fold,
She graspt the jar of amber sweets and next
The wheaten loaf, and, all rejoicing, bore
Them to a corner window-lit by niche
Deep sunk and narrow as the zone that bound
Her robe of scarlet samite at the waist.
A curtain loosely drawn before kept off
Intrusive eyes, and here the Queen retir'd.
Upon a ledge beneath the window lay
A sharpen'd knife with silvern hilt whereon
The cunning artisan had made the dog
To chase the boar, and, seizing this, the Queen
From off the loaf broad slices cut in haste,
And o'er them pour'd the honey from the jar
With murmurs of delight half-heard from lips
That now in ecstasy essay'd to taste.
Then o'er her senses past a drowsy calm
As, slowly eating there alone, she grew
Forgetful wholly of her lord the King,
Forgetful of the honey on her gown,

Forgetful of the dinner to be cook'd,
Forgetful of the swift-approaching noon,
Forgetful of her kitchen and its cares.
And this forgetfulness was pleasant to her.

Behind the palace, in a courtyard small,
Hemm'd in by walls to which the lichen clung
In stains of gold and silver laced with black,
The moon-faced Edith paced with hasty tread,
Bearing the basket with the Monday's wash.
Bare to the elbow were her sturdy arms,
On which, all red with labor, shone the suds.
Low overhead an hempen network fine
In intricate confusion mingl'd, cross
And bar. Thereon the damsel deftly flung
The many motley garments of the court,
Diverse of shape and in strange order set,
Since here the mended hose of poorest squire
Hung neighbor to the night-rail of the King.
Glad was the maid to think her work was done,
And all her youth broke forth in gladsome song —
The song itself a thing of little wit
But humble and accordant with her toil —

“ Rub, rub, and scrub ! the soap is on the shelf !
There's many a one much wiser than myself ;
But not an old man counting o'er his pelf.

“Rub, rub, and scrub! the soap is here by me!
And soap is such to me if not to thee;
And whether soap or soda let it be.

“Rub, scrub and rub! and the slack clothes-line blows:
Scrub, rub and scrub, and where is she? who knows?
From one wash to another wash she goes.”

Loud sang the maid, and all the while behind
An angle in the courtyard Modred sat
Sullen, and crouch'd with mischief in his heart.
Beside him glossy-wing'd, and sharp of beak,
A blackbird skulk'd, with evil eye upturn'd
To meet the evil eye of Modred bent
On him, and one were these in purpose ill.
Scarce could the knavish Modred bide the time
When he the moon-faced, unsuspecting maid
Might harm, and oft the blackbird pertly peer'd
Into his face, as one that sayeth “Here
Am I,” again, and “Master, is it time?”
At last it chanced that as the damsel mov'd
Among the garments that o'erhung the space,
And glisten'd in the sun, she turn'd her head
A moment toward the angle in the wall
All unregardful of the danger there.
Full roseate were her cheeks, but redder still
Her nose, wherefore, I know not, I but tell

The tale, and this, when wicked Modred saw,
He aim'd a villain's finger toward, whereat
The bird, upstarting, flew with direful speed,
And, ere the maid could frame a thought of ill,
Had nipt the crimson'd feature with his beak.
Sore was the hurt and loud the damsel shriek'd,
And wildly from the courtyard ran in haste
And pain, but ere she many steps had gone
A cord that Modred o'er the path had stretch'd,
Catching her feet low fell'd her to the ground.
All heavily she sank to earth and lay
As one whom fright and pain have overcome
At once and stol'n away the strength to move.

This saw the Prince, the while he prais'd the bird
For faithful service done, and then the twain
Departed by a secret way that none
But Modred knew. Within the damsel's breast,
Whenas she rose and gain'd her feet
And naught of bird or other creature saw,
Both rage and grief held riot bitter there,
But in the heart of Modred joy was lord.

SIR EVERGREEN.

ARGUMENT.

*The man in the wilderness asked me
How many strawberries grow in the sea ;
And I answered him as I thought good,
As many as red herrings grow in the wood.*

SIR BEVIS, faithful knight of Arthur's court,
Returning from some mission of his lord,
Who held him dear, and oft would send by him
Such secret message as none else might bear,
And who was known to all as form'd of truth
And loving service well compact, had found,
So late the hour, the gates of Camelot
Fast clos'd, and he without was fain to wait
Till morning 'neath the roof of one who dwelt
Beside the walls by mighty Merlin made ;
A kinsman whom Sir Bevis dearly lov'd.
Glad was the man when he Sir Bevis saw,
And heard the knight in courtly accents crave
A shelter till the morn, and gladly made
His kinsman of the famous Table Round
Right welcome to such cheer as he possest.

On oaken board he threw the damask cloth,
And on it laid the snowy manchet bread,
The pasty rich, the lordly round of beef,
And from a silver flagon poured the wine.
Naught said the knight till, meat and drink consum'd,
And hunger past, his tongue was therewith loos'd
And with a voice like to the mellow roll
Of music deep and full, far heard yet close
In seeming to the eager listener's ear,
He spoke :

“ Kinsman, thou shouldst have been with me
These five days past, which I, at Arthur's hest,
Have spent at court of Mark, the Cornish king
Who wedded fair Iseult of Ireland.
On him all courtesy is lost, but she
Is fairer than Queen Guinevere, and false,
Alas ! as fair, if there be any truth
In tales of her and Tristram buzz'd about
In Cornish court below us by the sea.
Thou shouldst have seen the feastings and the jousts
That graced my stay, for greatly Mark desires
With Arthur peace and therefore honor'd me
On embassy from blameless Arthur sent.
For me, I care not greatly for such sports,
But thou wast always of another mind
And therefore shouldst have gone along with me.”
He ceas'd, and resting idly, chin in hand,

And elbow propt upon the board, he bent

A keenly mirthful gaze upon his host.

Then he :

“Good Bevis, tell me not of Mark,
Of Cornish court, of feasts or lordly jousts,
For here, scarce three leagues off from Camelot,
Have I adventure had to last my life,
Yea, such, I thought, were like to end my life,
What time that thou wert feasting with King Mark.”

To whom the knight :

“Thou seemst in goodly trim
For one so late in peril of his life ;
But let me hear.”

Thereat while evening wan'd
The kinsman of Sir Bevis told his tale.

“But two days since upon a listless morn
On which the sun shone fiercely from a sky
Of brass, and all the winds were still and husht
The murmuring streets of busy Camelot
I sought yon forest that, dim miles away,
O'erspreads the plain that sloping gently bounds
The west. Therein mov'd I as one who needs
No friend to 'company his steps, and there,
Outworn by distance and by summer's heat,
Sank into sleep beside a hollow oak

And woke not till what time the evening fell
Across the land and feebly strove the pale
New moon to wrestle with the dark.

Then while

I rose bewilder'd, scarce as yet possest
Of full remembrance of my journey thence,
So dull'd my senses with yet lingering sleep,
There sudden brake from covert thick of bush
And brier that barr'd the way with thorny front,
One mightier than any knight who sits
At meat with Arthur at the Table Round.
Yea, to my fears he seem'd as huge as ten
Though they were each as stout as Lancelot,
And fast he gript me by the hair and arm.
The field mouse is not in the cat's grim clutch
More helpless than was I, thy kinsman, then,
And tremblingly I found my voice and spoke :
'Oh, who art thou who here at close of day
Dost hold me fast in peril of my life ?'
At these my words he loudly laught in scorn
And slowly rolling both his gleaming eyes
Upon me, gript the closer till I roar'd
For pain. Then made he answer rough and harsh
As watchdog's howling when the thief is nigh :

'The lord of this great forest, lo, am I !
And mighty through its fruits and roots am I.

Sir Evergreen am hight, and I can keep
Thee here till doomsday, an it pleaseth thee.'

To whom then I :

'Such fate would little please ;

'Twould please me much the best to be let go.'

Amaz'd, he of the wood upon me glar'd

The space of one long minute, and the woods

Were still. Then broke he into loud-voiced song :

'Fate ! fate ! 'tis fate that holds thee pris'ner here ;

Fate ! fate ! sharp fate, so think not to get clear.

No fate, no fate so terrible as I !

Have you not heard my strength no one can beat ?

Or, fling yourself in terror at my feet.

No fate, no fate so terrible as I !'

Full loud he sang the while I quak'd for fear,

And thro' the forest loud the grewsome stave

Resounded and the forest echoed 'I.'

Then as I wonder'd what should me befall,

Once more he spoke, and, full of dread, I heard.

'Poor craven denizen of Camelot,

'Twas not to slay and eat thee that I sought

Thee here. Not meet were it for me to eat
Thy flesh, seeing I eat not meat, but still
On fruits and roots have waxen strong, if wax
Be strong and strong be wax.'

Then I :

'Beeswax

They name it in the streets of Camelot.'

'Peace, kitchen knave !' loud roar'd Sir Evergreen,
'Thy prate is like the buzzing of some fly
That comes and goes and comes again, and yet
For nothing ; such thy foolish speech. And now
Hear me.'

'I cannot choose but hear, good sir ;
To me thy voice sounds louder than the blast
That down great chimneys roars at dead of night.'

At this, well-pleas'd, he of the wood relaxt
Somewhat his grasp and show'd his teeth in smile ;
A fierce array, tho' broken here and there.

'Know then, O kitchen knave,' his words to me,
'Within the dusky shadows of this wood
Have I these forty summers dwelt.'

Then I :

'And winters too, Sir Evergreen ?'

To which

He answer made :

‘Not winters *two*, dull knave,
But winters forty as the summers are,
Nor have I cold nor rheumatism felt ;
Yet dwelling thus it well may chance I know
But little of the outer world, and thou,
Belike, canst tell me what I fain would hear.’

He paus’d, as one who, at a loss for words,
Doth grope about the chamber of his brain,
And from the quest at last returns with those
He had not chosen were there room for choice ;
So far’d it with Sir Evergreen, who roar’d
Impatiently his eager question forth :

O kitchen knave, or whatsoe’er thou art,
Make answer truly, hast thou seen the sea ?’

He ceas’d, and in the gloomy wood no sound
Was there save faintest stir above our heads
Of half-awakened nestlings in the nest.
Then meekly question’d I :

‘The A, B, C ?’

Not so, O knave, the sea I mean doth wind
About the world, as once in youth I heard
 ‘A snake, like snake about its prey.
 Hast thou seen the sea ?’

‘Full oft, in winter storm and summer calm,
Sir Evergreen,’ I answered, chill with fear.

‘’Tis well,’ he roar’d, and more beside had said
But that I spoke again and all in wrath
He heard.

‘Strong sir, it is not well if thou
Dost speak thus of the sea, for well and sea
Are vastly different things, tho’ water lies
In both.’

I ended ; scarce my words were done
When all the temper of the man broke forth ;
Mighty his wrath and gustily he spoke :
‘Well me no wells or ’twill be ill with thee ;
Sea me no seas, for I will seize on thee ;
Lie me no lies or soon wilt thou lie there.’
Thereat he dragg’d me past the hollow oak
And fiercely pointed to a torrent deep
That many feet below us leapt and ran
’Mong sharp and ragged rocks that vext its course,
And made as he would hurl me thitherward.
More had he said, and op’d his mouth to speak
And op’ning, chok’d, (a frog, it may be, fill’d
His angry throat,) but later spoke more calm :
‘O knave, provoke me not, lest ill befall,
And now once more attend. There grow
This wood, beneath the leaves and creos which

The ground, red berries which the seeming wise
Call straw. Full sweet and toothsome to the taste
Are they, and on them have I often din'd
Nigh to that hour in which the golden sun
In high mid-heaven stands, and all about
The leaves hang quiet in the summer's heat, —
My one regret that there were all too few
To satisfy the hunger in my breast.
Now, kitchen knave, if haply thou canst tell
How many of these berries rare within
The sea do grow, it may be I can feed
Thereon when these within the woods are gone.'

He ended here, and on me bent his gaze
With all expectancy, as one who sits
Within a dry and thirsty land, and sees
The storm-clouds gather in the far southwest.
I pausing, I kept silence for a space;
Then, as the shadows darken'd in the wood,
And owls from out the hollow oak flew forth
With baleful shriek to meet the coming night,
Made answer to the question as I deem'd
It best. 'The sea is wide, Sir Evergreen,
A hard were it for any man to count
Number rightly all that is therein,
Near enow for purpose practical
With I may answer to thy quest.

Of berries toothsome, which the wise call straw,
(Though not a straw care I for what they say,
Not ev'n the straw which breaks the camel's back,
Nor that which shows the changeful current's course,)
There grow within the angry-bosom'd sea
As many as of herrings red are found
In green and dusky confines of the wood.'

Thus I, and he before me listen'd all
Attent as child who, by some fireside warm,
On winter evenings ere the hour for bed
Heark'neth, delighted, to some fairy tale,
But keepeth silent lest a word be lost ;
So all in hope heard he, but at the last
Grew sad and loos'd his grasp, yet gaz'd
Upon me sternly that I dar'd not stir
For fear. Then, while I wonder'd at him, gave
A cry whose tingling echoes reach'd the stars :
'O knave ! I know not what red herrings be !'
Full bitterly he cried, and, turning, past
Adown the forest, and the forest clos'd
Upon him, and uncheck'd I went my way."

"A grewsome tale," the bold Sir Bevis said
When all was ended and the story told,
And then the twain to slumber past, and dreams.

THOMAS AND VIVIEN.

ARGUMENT.

*Tom, Tom, the piper's son,
Stole a pig and away he ran.
The pig was eat, and Tom was beat
And Tom went crying down the street.*

THOMAS the young, Thomas the mischievous,
Thomas the dark-brow'd lad of Camelot,
After a day of mirth and reveling
At court, in which, tho' oft rebuk'd, his voice
Had ever mingl'd, louder than the rest,
And shriller than the storm-drave seabird's cry,
Alone within a triple-window'd room
That in his father's dwelling faced the east,
Upon his bed, ere sleep her wings had wav'd
Above him, lay and meditated much
In what new mischief he should next engage ;
Then, ere conclusion harmful could be reach'd,
Slipt into sleep, and dreaming, past to fields
Where youth and mischief held high holiday.

Sole son was he of old Sir Guy ; a man
Of stature humble, but of wisdom great,

Who now was counted of the Table Round,
But in his youth, as some could still recall,
Ere from the land of Cameliard he came,
The sometime piper to its lord and King
Leodogran, 'gainst whom the heathen warr'd;
But after, when the peerless Guinevere,
The daughter of Leodogran, had been
By holy Dubric to King Arthur wed,
Had past to Camelot; and there by dint
Of faithful service in a humble place,
But more because the King the fire of truth
And nobleness perceiv'd in him and lov'd
Him for it, was now made knight, and brightly shone
In burnisht armor at King Arthur's court.
With him the King had counsel many times,
For knowledge deep of men and things Sir Guy
Possest, and year by year his wisdom grew
The riper as his head grew white. But since
To no man living perfect wisdom comes
It hapt therefore, that in one thing, not small,
Sir Guy, the sage was wanting, and the King
To him had that day put a question hard.

“How chances it, Sir Guy,” had Arthur said,
“That thou whom all men reverently call
The wisest of our court, now Merlin lies
A pris'ner in the wood of Broceliande,

Hast fail'd, or so it seemeth to our eyes,
To rule and govern well thine only son ? ”
He ceas'd and then, from out a passage close
Beside, a woman came and stood before
And cried :

“ O King, who never yet wouldst see
And willingly, injustice done to aught,
Hearken to me. But now my son, in years
Scarce ten and slender as a flower, was set
Upon and beaten by a lad, the son,
It hap'neth, of thy wisest knight, Sir Guy,
And therefore may it please thee, noble King,
To see that this young Thomas, for so him
They call, be dealt with sternly, as is sure
His due.”

She spoke in haste, not seeing him
Who stood beside the king, and courteously
Made Arthur answer to her, and she went
From out the kingly presence glad of heart.
When the last echo of her steps had ceas'd,
The King again to his companion turn'd
Repeating in the glances of his eyes
The question that before was ask'd with lips.
Stroking his chin in thought, Sir Guy abode
In silence for a space, then, sudden, flasht
A face of mirthful radiance on the King,
And begg'd his lord would listen to a tale.

“Full willingly, Sir Guy,” replied the King,
And smooth’d the gilded dragon on his robe.

“A peasant in the land of Cameliard,”
Began Sir Guy, “a slender living won
By keeping ducks and geese, and round his hut
Their constant screams and quackings harshly rang
From earliest hours, — sweet music to his ears.
One spring it chanced that from the nest two geese
Came off at once leading their callow young.
One mother proudly walk’d in front of ten
Yellow as gold, and all submissively
They follow’d where she led, nor seem’d to dream
Of will apart from hers. The other goose
Was mother of but one, and this one black
And wayward, such as never had been seen.
In vain the mother strove obedience
From this to gain; and oft her comrades shook
Their heads, foreboding ills that lay in wait
For errant goslings that obey’d no law.
At last the mother strove no more but left
Her single gosling to its own wild will :
But when a year had gone the peasant saw
No finer bird amongst his flock than this
Of which such dire prediction had been made.
But she that led abroad her brood of ten
Ere summer ended saw them fall a prey

To enemies that lurkt in grass and pool,
And one by one they slowly disappear'd
Till autumn came and found her desolate."

"A clever tale," here spoke the King, and smil'd
"But all things are not rul'd by accident,
Sir Guy, and seldom from the thorns do men
Attempt the purple-cluster'd grape to pluck,
And this, Sir Guy, the wise, should know as well,
Or better, even, than the King himself."
Then, rising, Arthur past with thoughtful step
Unto the bower of Guinevere, his Queen.

Thomas the young, Thomas the mischievous,
Awak'ning on the morrow from his sleep,
Beheld from out the windows of his room
A sight that fill'd his bosom with delight,
For while as down the narrow street he glanced,
A well-fed sow, attended by the train
Of youthful swine that made her litter small,
With grunts of deep content slow rang'd along.
A moment only gaz'd the lad, then stole
With soundless steps down the long stair, and peer'd
Into the street without. In narrow lines
Thro' rifts between high houses shone the sun
And lay in golden bars across the street.
A soft breeze lifted banners from the walls

And tost them lightly in the air. Scarce had
The city wak'd, and only here and there
An early-risen scullion, rubbing eyes
In which the sleep yet linger'd, went his way
To morning task. The lagging steps of these
And noise of swine the only sounds that stirr'd
The silence of the town. All cautiously
The lad with careful feet, on mischief bent
Crept toward the trustful, unsuspecting swine,
But, as his shadow fell across a bar
Of gold, the mother felt the danger near,
And, shrieking, fled, with all her litter'd tribe
At heels. But one, the smallest, tenderest
Of all, because less swift of foot than all
The rest, the ruthless Thomas seiz'd and bore
Triumphant to his friend, the palace cook,
The twain intending later on the pig
To dine.

Ill reckon'd they, the knavish pair,
For wily Vivien thro' her lattice saw
The theft, and so, because she lov'd to tell
A tale, and more because the lad had been
Full oft a torment to her, later went
And told King Arthur what the son of Guy
Had done. The blameless King when he her tale
In silence heard, not doubting that for once
She spoke the truth, bade some one call Sir Guy

And Tom, and summon likewise all the court.
When this was done the King upon Sir Guy
Bent brows of sudden wrath and said :

“Thy ‘one

Black gosling,’ O Sir Guy, in growing up
To be the chiefest goose, or what thou wilt,
Of all his time, is like, I fear me much,
To prove a very fruitful source of ill
Among the youth of tender age at court.”
To this in humbleness Sir Guy replied :
“It may be as thou sayest ; therefore do
Unto him as thou wilt.”

Then call’d the King
Sir Kay, the seneschal, and gave command
That at the stroke of noon Sir Kay should lay
On thieving Thomas full twelve stripes with rod
Of season’d birch ; and hearing this, a smile
Of joy ran round the court, and no one rais’d
A voice of pity, for none pitied him.
Then as Sir Kay the luckless Thomas led
From out the presence of the court and King,
The wily Vivien past to where the cooks
And scullions bode and singling out the one
She knew to be the friend of Thomas, drew
From him with all her wondrous woman’s art
The after hist’ry of the stolen pig.

Won by the damsel's smile, before he knew,
The cook, a simple knave and all unus'd
To arts like these of Vivien's, promise gave
That he at noon the roasted pig would place
Upon the table in her private bower,
For on such fare full well she lov'd to dine.
The promise made again she smil'd and seem'd
As innocently fair as Enid, wife
To Prince Geraint, and, dazzl'd by such grace
To him, a kitchen servingman, he stood
With floury hands on hips and open mouth,
And wide eyes staring as she past without.

Thomas the young, Thomas the mischievous,
With dark anticipation watcht the sun
As rapidly it clomb the morning sky,
And much too short the time till from the tow'rs
Was clasht the hour of noon, but to the maid
The hours paced slow, and oft she sigh'd for noon
Impatiently exclaiming to herself
That never had been known a morn so long.
But when, on platter hot, the cook the pig
Brought in, her humor chang'd and thereupon
Grew all as sweet as breath of flowers in June.
Low bow'd the man as she within his palm
A gold'n token slipt from fingers white,
The while he heard her voice his cooking praise,

And felt the magic of her presence near
And vainly wish'd himself of her degree ;
For breath of scandal soiling Vivien's name
Had not so far as palace kitchen blown,
And therefore deem'd he still the damsel pure.

Long linger'd she o'er this her fav'rite dish,
And none the less 'twas sweet to her who knew
That high above the tumult of the streets
Below, in direful anguish, rang the shrieks
Of Tom.

*THE VISION OF SIR LAMORACKE.**ARGUMENT.*

*As I was going to Saint Ives
I met seven wives.
Every wife had seven sacks ;
Every sack had seven cats ;
Every cat had seven kits ;
Kits, cats, sacks and wives,
How many were going to Saint Ives ?*

KING PELLINORE of Wales, the same who slew
Lot, King of Orkney in the Northern seas,
Three stalwart sons in wedlock lawful had.
Sir Lamoracke de Galis eldest was
Of these, the next Sir Aglavale, the third
The pure Sir Percivale, and these were knights
Of Table Round, and with them Tor, the child
Of shame but brother to the three no less,
And first created knight of Table Round
The Table of the great Pendragonship.
Sir Lamoracke among King Arthur's knights
Was bravest save for three, but since the three
Were Lancelot, Tristram and Geraint, no less
Of honor deem'd it reck'ning fourth with these.

In the mid-strength and hardihood of youth
He was when vision by his sister seen,
A holy nun much worn by fastings long,
Sent half the court in quest of Holy Grail;
And Lamoracke went, as eager as the rest,
And all for holy longing underwent
Long toilsome days, and nights as wearisome,
And piteous perils manifold he knew,
Until, a twelvemonth past, he set his face
Again toward Camelot with yet no glimpse
Of what he sought, and sorrow in his heart.

One morning chanced it that while pacing slow
With head bent down and gaze upon the ground
On homeward way thro' forest deep that stretched
From Camelot southward many leagues, there crost
His path a ten-tin'd stag, and after rode
A knight he knew to be Sir Sagramour,
In fierce pursuit, who, seeing in the wood
A horseless knight all travel-worn and sad,
Left flying deer to its wild will and leapt
From his own horse and begg'd Sir Lamoracke
Ride in his place as being one of those
Who went in search of Holy Grail. Thus said
The sweet Sir Sagramour and added thence :
" Thy face, Sir Lamoracke, is not unknown
To me."

Then slowly Lamoracke answer'd him :

“O all for naught my quest and not for one
Like me the vision glorious, but thou,
Methinks, for knightly courtesy the peer
Of any at the court, might well have seen
What I, the son of Pellinore, have not.”

“Not I,” then spoke the sweet Sir Sagramour,
“Being ensnar'd with earthly things unto
My hurt, but an' I pray you, Lamoracke, ride.
My castle scarce a half league distant stands,
There mayst thou rest, at least until the morn,
And ride to court equipt as knight should be
So far as my poor store shall serve thy turn.”

Then Lamoracke lookt up and answer'd him,
“Ah, sweet Sir Sagramour, none other suit
Suits with my sadden'd fortunes like to this
Which now I wear and therefore in array
Like this must I before King Arthur pass
Once more.”

Then answer made Sir Sagramour :

“Thou knowest best, but still I pray you ride
Homeward with me and eat and rest a night ;
Else thou wilt never live to see thy lord
At all, in this or any other garb.”

Full gentle was the manner of the man,
And Lamoracke for utter weariness
Gave way and past with sweet Sir Sagramour
Unto the other's castle near at hand,
Yet thinking, "on the morrow I will go."
As one who following the chase for days
Scarce heeds his wearied limbs because so full
Of eager haste but home returning finds
Each step a pain and life a mockery,
So now with Lamoracke, who, with the fire
Of zeal and holy purpose quite burnt out,
Tarried for days with sweet Sir Sagramour,
Too weak for further travel and heart-sick
Withal because of failure in the Quest.
To him in those dark days came Sagramour
And whisper'd, "Courage ; failure is not crime."
And after came the wife of Sagramour
Beseeching him to be of cheer, to whom
He heark'n'd listlessly. Then came a child
The son of these, a three-years winsome lad
Who stammer'd "Courage " as he had been taught,
And seeing that Sir Lamoracke took no heed
Stammer'd his lesson o'er again, whereat
The knight, half rising on his elbow, turn'd
And saw the boy with parted lips, and cheeks
All satin soft, and hair and eyes the hue
Of sable pansies, staring full at him;

Then Lamoracke rose and caught the lad in arms
And kiss'd him oft and spoke full tenderly :
“Thou bidd'st me be of courage, little one?
Yea, for thy sake I will,” and from that time
Shook off, as far as might be, sad regret.

Yet still strength linger'd on its way to him,
And with these a sennight longer bode,
And after rose refresh'd and went his way.
But ere that time he told to please his host
Full many a tale of what had hapt to him
In Quest of Holy Grail and once the tale
Ran like to this.

“One morning after dreams,”

So said Sir Lamoracke, “of Holy Grail
Seen by me who unworthy am to see
With waking eyes, I past, for then was I
In Cornwall by the sea, along a road
That wound past splinter'd crag and shallow cove
To fishing village of Saint Ives. Seaward
Saint Michael's Mount rose like a vision fair
All roseate with dawn and softly broke
Against its base the Cornish sea. A light
Breeze blew that gently stirr'd the leaves and then
Rested content while overhead a flock
Of birds shrill'd one to other, flying south

The sound clear falling thro' the morning air.
The weather-beaten fishers mended nets
Sitting on boats updrawn beside the sea
And hail'd me with 'good-morrow' as I past,
In simple fisher wise. Suddenly round
An angle in the path before me came
Full seven fisher-wives bending beneath
A heavy burden each one bore in sack
Of dusty leather on her shoulders old.
Small trace had these of brow may-blossom, cheek
Of apple blossom or the eye of hawk,
And clumsily the wrinkl'd nose of each,
Tip-tilted, like a thirsty duckling's bill
After much guzzling in the pool, did seem
To point the way. A wailing clamor rose
In air and louder grew as nearer came
The seven, halting where I stood aside
To let them pass, and lowering their sacks
Upon the ground.

In much amaze I ask'd
The seven what their burden was, whereat
The nearest shrilly pip'd forth :

"Cats, sir knight,
To rid the palace of King Mark of rats
That fright the fair Iseult, his Queen."

At this
Each wrinkl'd dame her knotted sack-string loost

And forth from out the seven sacks there stalk'd
With pace sedate, and slowly waving tails,
And deep-ton'd purrings of well-fed content,
Full seven times seven cats and every one
The mother proud of seven kittens small
That sprawl'd and mew'd beside the sacks.

Such sight

I never saw in Camelot, altho'
Our Camelot is vaster than Saint Ives
And cats enow contains, as one may deem
Who finds his slumber broken by their wails
On roof and tow'r from midnight till the dawn,
And long I star'd at sprawling kits, and cats,
And sacks, and wives, until within the sacks
The seven wives replaced the cats and kits
And journey'd forward, wives, and sacks, and cats,
And kits, while I with musings curious
Past onward to Saint Ives."

"A sight indeed,"

Here spoke Sir Sagramour, "and speedily
The burden of the seven wives should clear
The Cornish castle of its brood of rats
Save one, its churlish lord, for fouler rat
Than Mark, the craven, lives not upon earth."

To whom Sir Lamoracke :

"True, Sir Sagramour,

But tell me of thy wit, which passes mine,
How many, reck'nest thou, to fair Saint Ives
Were going on that morning, kits, and cats,
And sacks, and wives."

So sweet Sir Sagramour
Knit brows, and tighten'd lips, and fingers told
The space of three long hours till fell the sun
And creeping darkness came upon the land,
And still no nearer was he to result
Than he had been at first when Lamoracke put
The question, nor with morning was it clear,
And with the morning Lamoracke went his way.

*THE RETURN FROM THE QUEST.**ARGUMENT.*

*Hark ! hark !
The dogs do bark ;
Beggars are coming to town.
Some in rags,
And some in tags,
And some in velvet gown.*

THE summer brooded and the winds were husht,
And on the palace walls the sunshine slept,
And all within King Arthur's court withdrew
To where the shadows deepest lay, and thought
Of winter and the snow. But he, the King,
Sitting beside a window that o'erhung
The stream that murmur'd past the lichen'd walls
And wander'd thro' the meadows to the sea,
Mus'd on the time when of the Table Round
The number was complete and of his knights
Not one was absent from his place. But now
The seat of many a one in Arthur's hall
Was vacant, and from off the walls was gone
Full many a blazon'd, burnisht, knightly shield.
This had not been, so sadly Arthur mus'd,
But for the apparition of the Grail
Seen in a vision by that holy maid,

The sister of Sir Percivale, who told
The wondrous tale to all his brother knights,
And straightway set them longing for the Quest.
Then, while he mus'd, the voice of Dagonet,
The fool, shrill'd thro' the silence, and the King
Lookt up. Before him stood the fool, who call'd,
"Arouse, my brother fool, and hark to me!"
Then answer'd Arthur, nothing loth to break
A jest or two with little Dagonet,
"But why thy brother fool am I?"

To whom

The jester, shaking all his bells, replied,
"What sayest thou of him who constant wears
A thistle next his heart and knows not whence
His pain? Who fain would make a shining crown
From lumps of lead? And such a fool art thou.
And therefore shouldst thou wear a cap and bells,
And therefore have I call'd thee brother fool."
Then thus the King:

"A bitter, pointless jest;

Thy wit doth not increase as doth thy age."

To whom, in answer, shrill'd Sir Dagonet:

"Said I not truly? Take my cap and bells;"

Then mutter'd, past the hearing of his lord,

"The thistle next his heart is Guinevere,

His Queen," and after, spoke aloud, "Thy knights,
My brother fool, are not they all dull lumps

Of lead? And after all thy pains are spent
Upon them leaden still they yet remain.
Of such as these thou vainly hop'st to make
A shining crown of manhood in thy realm,
And therefore have I call'd thee 'brother fool.'"
"Thy wit is sharply edged, my fool," here spoke
The King, "and yet, for all its sharpness, fails."

Thereat the dwarf peer'd curiously up
Into his master's face, and seeing naught
Unusual in its kingly grace, had turn'd,
But turning, caught the echo of a sigh,
And knew his arrow reach'd King Arthur's heart.
Thereafter fell a silence on the twain
And Arthur mus'd as sadly as before
On hopes that had been his in long-past days
When he had plann'd the healing of the world.
Slow past a morning hour until at last
A momentary vagrant breeze, that thro'
The high, unlatticed, open window swept,
Tost aimlessly an early wither'd leaf
Into the kingly lap. Then spoke the King,
Smoothing the faded leaf :

"Sir Dagonet,

It may be that thy song is gentler than
Thy wit; if so be, let me hear."

Whereat
The dwarf, moving to where a gilded harp
Half hidden in a corner of the room
Gleam'd like a star in mellow darkness set,
Sudden swept all its strings impatiently,
And when the gust of music sank and died
And rose again to live in wailing, sang, —
And sad and bitter were the tune and words.

“High hopes — high deeds — we hope but while we
may ;
The buds have blown, their perfume is no more ;
The time is sped, the glory past away ;
New time, new strife, — the hours of joy are o'er ;
New strife, new hate, to fit this later day ;
New hates are deep as those that were before ;
High hopes — high deeds — we hope but while we
may.”

The singer ended, and his bitter notes
Were follow'd by the snapping of a string.
Then said the King :

“Ye do the harp a wrong,
To make it sponsor for your grewsome stave,
And kinder had it been to chant a strain
More pleasing unto weary ears like mine.”

To whom then sadly spake Sir Dagonet :

“ No lightsome lays are left to sing ; the hours
Of joy are o'er ; ” and while the King his words
Revolv'd in mind and echo found therein,
The dwarf obeisance made and danced away.

“ High hopes — high deeds — we hope but while we
may,”

The King said slowly to himself, and paus'd,
For sudden rose a clamor in the streets,
As if the countless dogs of Camelot
Were all one voice, such uproar was there made.
Then Arthur, wond'ring at the din, arose
And past to an apartment that o'erlookt
The city's streets, and peering forth, he saw
A train of weary pilgrims near the city walls.
Then open swung the weirdly sculptur'd gates,
And Arthur knew the men, his knights return'd
From Quest of Holy Grail. And first rode Bors
And Lancelot. Dim were the trappings once
So gay on men and steeds, and tatter'd shreds
Now wav'd and flutter'd from their garments' hems.
Behind rode Percivale, in dusty rags,
And after, others worn and torn as he,
And beggars never seem'd so poor as these,
The crest and flower of Arthur's Table Round ;

But last of all Gawain in velvet fine
Flasht gayly by with knightly comrades twain,
For pleasant was the Quest for him who made
So sure the holy Quest was not for him,
And thus King Arthur saw his knights return
From Quest a twelvemonth long of Holy Grail.

Loud rose the canine clamor in the streets
As these rode by, a beggar throng to eyes
Which saw them pass beyond the city walls
The year before, impelled by holy zeal,
And he who now shone brightest, false Gawain,
In honor's ranks the faintest of them all,
But shriller rang the voice of Dagonet
Dancing beside the train, who, as he saw
The kingly face regarding all who past,
With slender finger pointed to the knights
Return'd as beggars from their bootless Quest,
And sang, and bitter both the notes and words, —

“ High hopes — high deeds — we hope but while we
may.”

*THE MAID'S ALARM.**ARGUMENT.*

*Little Miss Muffet
Sat on a tuffet,
Eating of curds and whey.
There came a black spider,
Which sat down beside her,
And frightened Miss Muffet away.*

QUEEN GUINEVERE at Almesbury abode
Unknown, after her shameful flight from court,
And there the long days came and went, and found
And left her thrall to grief. One little maid
Companion'd her, a novice in that house,
To whom the Queen in lighter hours of grief —
For sorrow weighs not always equally,
Else there were none could bear — gave listless heed.
As one through blinding mists of care and dole
Might half discern a kitten at its play,
And smile, scarce comprehending why, so she,
The Queen, unto the novice's prattle turn'd
Half ear, dulling, it may be, thus the edge
Of grief, for low the maiden's voice and sweet.
“Sir Feumbras my father was,” so said

The maid, "a knight of Arthur's Table Round,
A goodly man, much favor'd of his King.
To him King Arthur gave to wife the fair
Jehanne of Camelot, and I was born
Of these who in the selfsame summer died,
A lustrum since."

Low to herself the Queen,
"I knew them both, a simple, happy pair,
Who lov'd each other and who knew no sin."
Then spoke again the maid :

"Thereafter liv'd
I with the kinsfolk of my name until
A twelvemonth back I came to Almesbury.
But oft I sigh for Camelot and think
In dreams I hear my father call my name,
The name himself would give me when I pleas'd
Him well, for yet I had another name."
"Yea, and what was it?" said the sad-ey'd Queen.
To whom the novice answer'd,

"Guinevere,
The name that's borne at court by Arthur's Queen."
"A luckless name," the Queen made answer here,
"A name that carries with it shame and tears."
"And think you thus?" in awe the novice said,
"Yet so it seems these latter days, if words
They say of Arthur's Queen indeed be true.

Perchance my father fear'd it when he call'd
Me Muffet in its stead. Would I might hear
Him call me Muffet now,"—and here the maid
Her sentence broke in air and mus'd a space,
And silence fell upon the twain, and roll'd
Far off the thunder while a summer storm
Drew quickly on.

Then guilty Guinevere
Past into sadder musings than the maid's,
And nearer crept the storm and darker grew
The cell wherein they sat. But she, the Queen,
Deep wrapt in bitter thoughts, knew not of this,
But felt at last a pulling at her gown,
And, rousing, saw no form, but heard a cry,—
"The storm! the storm." Then came a deaf'ning
sound,
As if the tow'rs of all the world were thrown
To earth, and in the yellow, quiv'ring flame
She saw the novice's frighten'd face and gleam
Of holy symbols on the wall. Close clung
The maid, and when the storm grew one fierce roar,
And darting flame one baleful yellow glare,
Shudd'ring, the novice hid an awestruck face
Within the folds of samite black that clothed
The Queen. Then Guinevere the elder threw
One arm about the younger Guinevere,
And waited for the ceasing of the storm.

Guilt shielding tender Innocence, — thus ran
The bitter thought of Arthur's sinful wife.
So past an hour, until, its passion spent,
The storm rush'd angrily to other lands,
And drew with it the roar and gloom and glare;
And after, through the casement, came a shaft
Of yellow sunbeam, that in sport did seem
To move and flicker o'er the rush-spread floor.
Thereat the little novice rais'd her head
From out the sable samite folds, and fell
Again to harmless prattle of herself
And of her simple life before she came
To Almesbury.

“Few mates I had, nor car'd,”
So went the tale, “and happier was I
To sit at home and list to tales of arms
Told by my father and his brother knights
Than roam the city streets unthrift of joy.
And when my mother prais'd my daily task
If done as she would have it, would she place
Upon the board before me curds and whey
With snowy manchet bread for well she knew
What fare of all I deem'd the best.

And once
I sat beneath a hanging vine, that made
A cool, green shadow at the farther end
Of the long garden at my father's house.

Over me sang the joyous birds full sweet,
And close beside uprose a lofty wall,
On which the golden moss and lichen slept.
A curious, carven, wooden bowl I held,
Fill'd almost to its brim with curds and whey,
And on the crimson-tufted tuffet where
I sat, with space enow for two, a loaf
Of toothsome manchet lay. No single care
Had I, the contents of the carven bowl
The limit of my childish wants ; but ere
The spoon to lip was lifted, all the song
Above my head was husht and silence crept
Athwart the golden afternoon. Then I,
With boding fear, turn'd to the lichen'd wall
And on its surface saw a hideous blot
With moving legs, and horny claws, and eyes
Quick darting. Scarce my father's blazon'd shield
Might hide the creature's bulk, for surely saw
I never yet a spider huge as this
Which from the wall at last, down-dropping, came
And on the crimson-tufted tuffet sat,
And sitting, turn'd its baleful glance on me.
A moment only stay'd I there in fear,
And then the horror of it on me grew
Until I fled in haste, the carven bowl
Rolling before me, and the garden walk
Whit'ning with streaming curds and whey. And when

I told the tale indoors, Sir Feumbras,
My father, shook his head and fear'd lest this
Might be an omen of dread thing to be,
And went at last to Merlin with the tale,
Whom all men counted wisest of the time."
With mention of the wizard's name, the Queen,
Who had half heard, not wholly lost, the tale,
Rous'd to the full ear as she ask'd, "What said
The sage?"

"But little we might understand,"
Replied the maid, "for dark his meaning was,
And faint his words behind his winter beard,
But mostly seem'd it like to this: 'Again
In years to come a shape beside the child
Shall sit; not black, like this, but fair to look
Upon, and safer were she by the first
With bowl of curds and whey.' Thus Merlin spake,
But I, — I know not all he meant."

Thereat

The Queen looked hard upon the maid, in doubt
If she were simple-seeming as her words;
And while she gazed her face grew stern and dark,
The sunshine drew itself from off the floor,
The wind swept sobbing thro' a door ajar,
And, in a sudden horror, from the room
The maid fled shuddering!

*THE WATER CARRIERS.**ARGUMENT.*

*Jack and Gill went up the hill
To draw a pail of water.*

*Jack fell down and broke his crown
And Gill came tumbling after.*

“SO all day long the noise of battle roll’d
Among the mountains by the winter sea,”
But young Lavaine, the knight of Astolat,
And brother to the lily maid who died
For Lancelot’s love, was reckon’d not of those
Who “fell in Lyonesse about their Lord,”
King Arthur, whom the three Queens bore away.
For he, Lavaine, who lov’d Sir Lancelot
But revered his King and conscience more,
Had hasten’d to the standard of his King
When evil-hearted Modred rais’d revolt,
And Lancelot, the faithless, stain’d, alas!
His manhood, warring ’gainst his friend and King.
And so, because the lad was true and brave,
And modest seeming, nor was rash of speech,
Had Arthur made him of the Table Round

And lov'd to have him near. Whereat Lavaine
Greatly rejoic'd and gladly would have died
To serve in any wise the blameless King.
But when the sun came from the under world
And shone upon that field of battle near
The winter sea, Lavaine by Arthur's side
Receiv'd a vengeful thrust aim'd at the King,
And from his horse, slow reeling, fell, and o'er
Him swept the host ; but bluff Sir Torre, who saw
His brother fall, came spurring hence and dragg'd
Him to one side, and there, in knightly wise,
Gave him such tendance as his wit devis'd,
And left him, guarded by a humble squire,
But thinking, " If I live, I will return ; "
And scarce an hour was gone before a stroke
From one of Modred's men had cleft Sir Torre
From brain to nape. So died he for his Lord.

But of his tendance or his death Lavaine
Knew naught, but lay in stupor deep as death,
And to the eye that watch'd he seem'd as dead.
Whereat the humble squire mus'd to himself :

" If he be dead, he needs not me to guard ;
And if he be alive his foes will think
Him dead, and truly I do deem him dead,
Yet be he dead or living I must see

The issue of the fight," and saying went
And saw, and, seeing, met the death which might
Have spar'd him by the side of Sir Lavaine.

"So all day long the noise of battle roll'd,"
Yet Sir Lavaine in stupor lay upon
The field until the sun went down, and shone
The moon at full upon his armor clasps
And glinted on the chasing of his sword.
As one who journeying in lands remote
Returning takes by slow degrees the old
Life up, so Sir Lavaine return'd from death
Or what had seem'd like death, not all at once
But dimly had a knowledge of his state
And what had past, and then, because too weak
To think, he fell in sleep again and wak'd
Not till the sun brake from the underworld,
And near him, having watch'd the barge that bore
King Arthur out of sight, there slowly drew
The bold Sir Bedivere. These two last left
Alive upon the field.

The mournful twain

At length slow moving from the field, because
Lavaine was weak from hunger and the wound,
Past on to where within a little wood
A simple hermit liv'd a blameless life.

With him the pair abode until Lavaine
Was heal'd and then the bold Sir Bedivere
Past to his own land, distant Cameliard,
And then, a little later, past Lavaine
To his.

Small joy was now at Astolat
For him, the last of all his race, and night
And day he seem'd to hear the lily maid
Singing her swan song from the eastern tow'r,
Or bluff Sir Torre stride thro' the broken halls,
Or else his father, dead a year ago,
Calling him tenderly as was his wont,
And so by always listening to the dead
He ceased to hearken to the living voice,
And more and more withdrew into himself.

But when the next approaching spring had fail'd
To stir the languid blood within his veins,
The dumb old servitor before him stood
One April morning in the castle yard
And pointed to the south, and then by signs
Essay'd to free his mind, and Sir Lavaine,
Half comprehending, asked him, "Shall I go
Thither?" Thereat the dumb old man nodded,
His finger once more pointing to the south.
So, deeming that his humble servitor

Had deeper knowledge of the best, Lavaine,
A little later gathering the few
Who serv'd for love, not hire, within the halls
Of Astolat, past with them into lands
Of Cornish name, and made a home for them
And for himself ; and, marrying a maid
Of Cornish race, saw children of his own
And all the past became a memory.

Before his home in Cornwall lay the sea,
And a thick wood behind it northward stretch'd
But to the left a dusty white road climb'd
A hill on which there frown'd a single tow'r,
And on the farther side a hamlet slept
In peace and plenty, owning him for lord.
There o'er his Cornish castle past the years
From churlish winter into spring until
Ten times the ash buds blackened with the winds
Of March since blameless Arthur past beyond
The mournful gaze of bold Sir Bedivere.

A younger copy of himself, or like
Himself when but eight tender seasons old,
Now listen'd, wonder-ey'd, to Sir Lavaine
When he would talk of arms and of the last
Great day in Lyonesse. Jack had the lad
Been call'd for some past claimant for the hand

Of her Lavaine call'd wife, yet this Lavaine
Knew not, but deem'd the unfamiliar name
A careless fancy of his Cornish wife's,
Whose lightest fancy 'twas his care to please.
Slender the lad, as once his father was,
But all the blood of lusty Astolat
Made summer in his veins. Seldom apart
From him his sister Gillian was, and each
Without the other droopt and pin'd. Most like
Her aunt, the dead Elaine, young Gillian seem'd,
And oft the father, looking at her, felt
Remembrance of the distant past confuse
The present, till if he were boy or man
And this his child or playmate sister seem'd
Sometimes a thing of doubt.

The two, the maid

And Jack, lov'd better than all else to climb
The long white road, that steep and stony, led
Up to the single, broken, frowning tow'r.
Four trees beside the tow'r bent o'er a spring
That broke from out a sombre, rocky cleft.
Here Tristram once had drunk with fair Iseult,
Mark's wife, and laught to see the shining drops
Slip thro' her fingers, when she held her hand
Cupwise, that he might drink therefrom. And here
Had sweet Sir Percivale once stopt to drink,

Returning from the Quest of Holy Grail ;
Here, too, had Pelleas, the bright boy knight,
A brief hour linger'd, flying from the court
In that dark time when all his early faith
In woman's virtue died, and good Sir Bors,
The false Gawain, the pure Sir Galahad,
And many more of that great Table Round
Had drunk from these sweet waters to their gain.
Full oft had Gillian and the stripling Jack
Bent o'er the spring as bent the trees above,
And laught to see two faces gazing up,
One fair and pale, the other fair and red.
Maid Gillian's was the one, the other his.

Now as it hapt, Lavaine in that tenth year
Fell ill of some dull fever in the blood,
And twenty mornings past and still the knight
Felt the slow poison creeping thro' his veins
And grew at last indifferent to the end.
To him maid Gillian pityingly came
And said with tears :

“ Sure am I that one thing
Would cure this deadly fever.”

Then Lavaine :
“ Yea, dost thou think it, little maid ? then let
Me hear.”

Then she :

“ A draught of water brought
From spring beside the tow’r would cure, so pure
It is and sweet, and Jack and I would bring
It gladly an’ ’twould please you drink, my lord.”
To whom the sick man answer’d wearily,
Yet thinking she by chance had spoken truth
As he bethought him of the water’s fame :
“ Child, since you wish it, bring, and I will drink.”

Thereat and lightly sprang the maiden down
The steps that led to outer air, and close
Beside came Jack, a silver vessel swung
From one small hand, and so the childish twain
Went up the hill and quickly reach’d its top.
Then Jack, with Gill beside, stoopt low and fill’d
The vessel till the drops did chase themselves
All down its burnisht sides. This done, they left
The spring, and holding each the vessel’s rim,
Return’d as they had come, but slower, lest
By haste the precious draught were spilt and lost.
Then as in distance smaller grew the tow’r
Behind, the maid broke out in tender song :

“ Sweet is the sunshine coming after rain ;
And sweet this water unto lips in pain :
Which is the sweeter ? that in truth know I.

“Light, art thou sweet? then sweeter waters be :
Light, thou art grateful ; sweet this draught to me.
O light, if death be near him, let me die.

“Sweet light that fades at eve too soon away,
Sweet waters springing from the dark to day,
Which is the sweeter? that in truth know I.

“Pain, follow night, and henceforth from him flee ;
Thou needs must follow night that waits for thee ;
But, if thou wilt not, then O let me die.”

Clear with the last line rang her voice, and Jack,
Who heeded not his ways when Gillian sang,
Slipt, as the last note ceas'd, upon a piece
Of sliding stone, and slipping, fell, dragging
The singer down, and both together roll'd,
All in a horror of loose stones and dust
And flying limbs and broken bones and crowns,
Far down the steep side of that rocky hill.
So perish'd these two of the fated house
Of Astolat ; and in the night that follow'd,
And near a dawning fierce with wind and rain,
Wherein the sea wag'd battle with the sky
And both with earth, to final judgment past
Lavaine.

THE PASSING OF THE SAGES.

ARGUMENT.

*Three wise men of Gotham
Went to sea in a bowl ;
If the bowl had been stronger
My story had been longer.*

SIR VALENCE, son of Eglamour, and last
Of ten tall sons who made their father's name
A name of all men honor'd ere he past
From out the kindly winter of his age
To judgment and the unseen life beyond,
Mus'd on a mournful midnight o'er the fate
That left him, almost ere his beard was grown,
Alone, the last of all his race. For these,
His stalwart brothers, fell on that great day
In Lyonesse, and he, returning home
From embassy to Breton court, had miss'd
By passage of a few days the chance of death
In battle for his lord. So, coming late
To that lone field of combat by the sea,
He found nor living friend nor foe, but thick
As wave-wash'd pebbles on a wintry shore

Forsaken by a faithless ebbing tide,
Lay dead his foes and friends. Then past in grief
Sir Valence to the chapel nigh the field
Where Bedivere the wounded Arthur bore,
And all the man within was broken up,
And like a sudden fountain flow'd his tears,
And like a bitter wailing were his words.
"O nevermore," moaned Valence, "on this earth
Shall I the Table Round or Arthur see,
For Modred's host have slain the men I lov'd,
Not sparing one; and tho' they say our lord,
King Arthur, cannot die, and tho' he lies
Not dead upon the field, yet he is gone,
Yea, he is gone, and all my house are dead.
And what henceforth is left to me?"

Thus he

In loneliness of spirit moan'd aloud,
And after past without the chapel down
The splinter'd crags to that great water's marge
Beneath, thinking the while, "Here will I die."
But while he stood on a wave-eaten rock
That thrust itself from shore so far beyond
Its fellows that its base was sunk from sight
Nine fathoms, and there pois'd himself in act
To leap into the surge, an arm arose
From out the flashing surface of the lake,
"Cloth'd in white samite, mystic, wonderful,"

And pointed northward, while a great cry shrill'd
Thro' all the winter silence, warning him
Therefrom. And when the echoes of that cry
Had lost themselves among the barren crags,
A voice that seem'd to come from east and west
And north and south at once, with murm'ring fill'd
His ears, but clearer grown, resolv'd itself
To this :

“Thy lord, King Arthur, is not dead,
But past into Avilion valleys where
There falleth neither rain nor snow, nor blows
The gale ; but know, Sir Valence, that the way
To his blest presence is not by this gate
That thou wouldst open.”

After this the voice
Became a murmur once again and sank
To silence, and the mystic arm slipt down
Into the bosom of the lake, and night
Came striding o'er the hills, and all was dark.

Thus warn'd, yet little comforted, the knight,
His pathway later lit by waning moon,
Past upward from the lake, and thence by slow
Removes to lands of his near Cameliard.
There he, sole heir to all his father's house
Possesst in these its latest, saddest days,
A batter'd castle and a ruin'd tow'r,

And scanty leagues of marsh thro' which there wound
A sullen river, slipping toward the sea,
Past languid days of listless idleness
Among the few retainers of his house,
And gladly would have died if that might be,
But fear'd to end his life, remembering
The voice. So joyless past the time until
A mournful midnight came, sobbing with wind
And rain, and while Sir Valence sadly mus'd
Beside a fitful, slowly sinking fire,
There stood before him Ban, his seneschal,
An agèd man with thousand-wrinkl'd face,
Saying a traveller at the castle gate
Craved food and shelter for the night.

“Yea, let
Him in,” Sir Valence said, “and bring him here,
And set before us bread and meat and wine.”

Thereat old Ban departed, but return'd
A moment after with a stranger knight,
Upon whose bearded face Sir Valence gaz'd
An instant doubtfully before he spoke
In way of courtesy, because half deem'd
He that he knew the man.

Then said the knight :
“Thou know'st me not, Sir Valence, but thy sire
Was known to me, and likewise all thy house

But thee. Sir Sagramour am I, now bent
On errand northward to the court of Lot,
But brought by old-time yearning to thy halls
To welcome seek from son of Eglamour."

"Thou hast it, sweet Sir Sagramour," then spoke
Sir Valence courteously, "albeit I
Have little left to entertain a knight
Of such fair presence as he may deserve,
Yet what I have is freely thine ; I pray
You use it willingly as such."

Meantime

The thousand-winkl'd man had laid the board,
And placed thereon a pasty, manchet bread,
And gleaming flagons of red wine.

Thereto

Sir Valence pointed, and the twain sat down,
And warm'd their hearts with wine, and nurs'd the
while

A growing friendship each for other till
The fire by Ban re-kindl'd wan'd again.
Then Valence, pushing back his chair, began :
"I have not seen so glad a time as this
Since I return'd from Breton court, and I
Beseech you, sweet Sir Sagramour, to bide
With me such time as thy affairs allow."

Then made the other answer, graciously,
“I find no other pleasure but my host’s
Within my heart, and therefore will I bide
And gladly, here a little space.”

So he,
Sir Sagramour, abode, and brighter seem’d
The castle for his presence, and the heart
Of Valence lighter grew : and Sagramour
Perceiving this told merry tales, and oft
Provok’d his host to mirth : and once the tale
Was in this fashion told.

“ Ere Arthur came,”
So ran the words of sweet Sir Sagramour,
“ A petty princedom lying east from here,
Held on its seaward border one small town
Call’d Gotham, full of strange mad folk, and three
There were esteem’d as wise as Merlin was
At court of Camelot : and yet the three
Were madder than the rest. Now as it chanced
These Gotham sages all at once were fill’d
With wild desire to travel on the sea
Before their doors, and many plans they laid
To bring to pass fulfilment of desire ;
But all were fruitless, till one happy day
The maddest of the three within his brain
Conceiv’d the fancy of a giant bowl

Of wood which might be sent upon the sea,
Whilst they within, all jubilant, might ride.
So half the men in Gotham set at work
To make the bowl ; and when 'twas done and launch'd,
The sages, sitting on the bowl's sharp edge,
Their voices lifted high in gleeful song.

“ ‘O sun, that shinest sweetest on the wise,
O moon, that flingst a veil across our eyes,
Shine softly : now our bowl hath toucht the sea.

“ ‘O poppies red that lull us quick to sleep,
O poppies red that drowsy secrets keep,
Blow softly ; twice our bowl hath dipt the sea.

“ ‘O owls, that carol in the fearsome dark,
O owls, that carol sweeter than the lark,
Sing softly : twice our bowl hath dipt the sea.’

“ So sang the Gotham wise men, while the bowl
Upon an ebbing tide mov'd from the shore,
And as their figures blurr'd with distance, sang
Again, and fainter both the tune and words.

“ ‘O sea-bowl, tossing on the watery crest,
O sea-bowl, with three sages in thy breast,
Toss gently, thrice our bowl hath dipt the sea.’

“Thereafter,” said Sir Sagramour, “there came
A fierce, wild gale from out the north,”—then paus’d
As one whose tale is done.

“What then?” here spoke
The host, impatient of the pause.

Whereat

The other :

“Longer far had been my tale
If Gotham’s giant bowl had stronger been.
But come, we waste the hours ; I pray you go
With me to Orkney. In a month we will
Return.”

*CONSTANTIUS AND HELENA.**ARGUMENT.*

*"Old King Cole
Was a merry old soul,
And a merry old soul was he :
He called for his pipe
And he called for his bowl,
And he called for his fiddlers three."*

KING COÏLUS — the first of Britain's kings
Who made the legions sent from overseas
By Rome, with Cæsar's eagles at their head,
Pause in their northward marching from the coast —
Upon a stormful night in April forced
His way, with all his warriors at his back,
(In number as the needles of the pine,
And like the pine in sinewy strength and height,)
Past Roman guards and sentinels o'erthrown
And slain, to where the sacred eagles blaz'd,
In fitful glare of torch and beacon ray,
Within the town Camelodunum call'd,
High on the hill that overlooks the Colne.
So all that stormful night the Roman blood
Incarnadined the Colne, and all the slopes

Were strewn with carnage ; and the dawning came
And shot red rays athwart the crimson pools,
And o'er the heaps of Roman dead, and o'er
The joyous horde of Cole victorious,
And red was all the land.

Thus broke the king

The power of distant Rome, or so it seem'd ;
And merrily did Coïlus rebuild
The city, calling to his aid the might
Of Bleys, the great magician, he who made
Brandagoras of Latangor his slave
A twelvemonth's space because of insult done
Some ancient shrine ; and on the heights arose
Camelodunum fairer than before,
A mighty city, girdl'd round with walls
That mounted skyward and yet fail'd to hide
The tow'rs and spires that lost themselves in air.
There, in the carv'd stone palace built by Bleys,
King Coïlus liv'd merrily and well :
And with him Helena, his child, the pride
And chief delight of Coïlus, and fair
As maid may be on this our earth and seem
In any wise as one of earth ; and oft
The merry king, regarding her, was mute
With memories of one who look'd like her
Some twenty changeful changing seasons back,—
The maiden's mother, and the only child

Of Urien of Wales.

Now while the king
Past merry days surrounded by his lords,
And lov'd by all, from Helena his child
To poorest beggar that e'er crav'd an alms,
Far overseas the legions gather'd strength,
And passing with their eagles o'er the strait
That lay between the chalk-white cliffs and Gaul,
Halted before Camelodunum's walls,
And strove, but vainly, 'gainst the might of Cole,
As strives some ardent climber some high cliff
To scale that beetles o'er its base, or waves
That fain would overleap the same sheer height,
And striving ever, ever fail.

Nathless,
Undaunted as the surge, Constantius,
The Roman leader, lay before the walls
With all the flower of Rome within his camp,
Till thrice the summer into autumn past,
And thrice the dead leaves redden'd all the Colne,
And thrice the bitter winds of winter rav'd,
And thrice the lark became "a sightless song."
But when the third springtide was wellnigh past,
Constantius, despairing of success,
Was mov'd to raise the siege, since all his art
Avail'd him not before the walls uprear'd

By Bleys. Yet ere his thought past into act,
It chanced that he one morning heard a voice
Of mellow sweetness falling through the air,
And looking up, he saw fair Helena
Upon the walls, and listening, he heard
The words she sang, and hearing, straightway fell
In longing for the maid, and seeing, blest
The gods who granted him so fair a sight.
But she upon the walls sang on as one
Who sings for joy of heart, not heeding him,
Or seeming not to heed Constantius,
Who, far below, listen'd and look'd and lov'd.

“A star, but one, one only star saw I,
A star, one star, far through the frosty air,
One star, a star that lighten'd all my sky,
One star, my star, that sparkl'd past compare, —
I reck'd not of the cold, the star was there.

“One star, a star that seem'd far off, yet nigh,
One star, one star with rays that shimmer'd fair,
No star but one, none other star saw I.
One star, my star; a star that cannot die, —
They miss who seek it if the moon be there.”

“My star, one star, none other star for me,”
Constantius said within himself whenas

The song was ended and the singer gone
From off the walls, and, ere the sun had paus'd
In high mid-heaven, and the noontide hour
Was hammer'd out from tower and spire, the King,
Within the carven palace built by Bleys,
Was told a messenger from Roman camp
Crav'd speedy hearing for his message brought.
Bluster'd King Cole :

“ Yea, let him in : I fain
Would know what he, my foe, Constantius,
Would say to me by churl of his.”

Low bow'd
The Roman, entering, at the feet of Cole,
To whom that other spake through frosty beard,
“ Thou hast a message : speak, and let me hear.”
Thereat the messenger :

“ O Coïlus !
Constantius knows thee great, believes thee wise
Beyond the measure of all other men,
And gladly would exchange the name of foe
With thee for that of friend ; and therefore he,
My master, offers peace,— such peace as broods
O'er lands where plenteous content is lord,
And one condition only doth this peace
Stand fast upon : that he may have to wife
The princess Helena.”

He ceas'd and bow'd
Once more, while Coïlus revolv'd in thought
The message of Constantius, inclin'd
The more to grant the Roman leader's prayer,
Since he was much awearied of the siege
Which kept him in Camelodunum pent.
So, turning to the lords about him, spake :
" You heard this Roman : what say you, my lords ? "
But staying not for answer, bade one call
His daughter Helena, who straightway came.
To her the King made known the Roman's wish,
And added, " Now what says my Helena
Unto the suit of brave Constantius ? "

Now it had chanced that Helen, while she sang,
Had with a sidelong azure-lidded eye
Beheld the Roman leader far below,
Yet not so far but she might see his gaze
Rapt upon her, and seeing lov'd in turn.
Therefore when Cole, the merry, question'd her
What should be said, she rais'd an innocent face
And murmur'd:

“ Surely peace is sweet to have,
My father : who am I to bar the door
Against it, and prolong the doleful siege ? ”

So peace was made, and Helena was wed

Unto Constantius, and all the bells
Of great Camelodunum rang, and Cole,
The merry, at the marriage call'd for pipes
And bowl, and flowing bowl and pipes, and while
The pipers drank great draughts from out the bowl,
Call'd loudly for his fiddlers three.

A Tale of Tuscany.



*An Old-World tale. Who reads perchance
May deem it dull or idly told,
Preferring latter-day romance
Where well trained hearts their loves unfold.*

A TALE OF TUSCANY.

TUSCANY, land of fierce hates and wild loves and of
limitless passions,
Tuscany, home of Petrarca and Dante and lively
Boccaccio,
Tuscany, home of the Angelic Painter revered through-
out Europe,
Thou art the scene of this story : in thee all its actors
lie buried.

Near to a stream that escaped from Fiesole's heights
and that wandered
Down through vast forests of chestnut and unto the
plain that stretched eastward,
Where it meandered at will until lost in the turbulent
Arno,
Stood in the days when the land was ruled o'er by the
mighty Lorenzo,
Stood, and still stands, although now but a ruin, four
centuries later,

Villa Alberti, the home of a youthful and passionate
noble

Known far and wide for his pitiless temper that recked
not of mercy.

Cosmo Alberti his name, and for wife he had taken
Bianca,

One of the house of Bordoni and daughter of Luigi
Bordoni

Many times chosen a prior of merchants of silk in
Firenze.

Fair was the face of the maid and her voice was as
sweet as the nightingale's

Heard in mid-May when the forest rejoices in newly-
won verdure.

Gracious her manner to all and so great was the charm
of her presence

That at the banquets the wealth and the pride of
Firenze attended

None of its maidens were paid so much honor as
gentle Bianca.

Simple and fresh was her spirit despite all the praise
she excited

Equal in measure from amorous youth and from grey-
headed statesmen.

Nor was the fame of her beauty and sweetness con-
fined to Firenze ;

Roman ambassadors when they returned to the City
Eternal

E Spoke of it freely, while light-hearted gallants of Pisa
and Lucca,
1 Passing a season in Tuscany's proudest of cities,
Firenze,
Spread on returning the praise of the beautiful Floren-
tine maiden.

But, as it chanced, unto Cosmo Alberti, her name was
a strange one

Even when Tuscany rang with her manifold virtues
and graces,

For from his villa he seldom went forth to the city,
preferring

J Either to follow his own lawless will in his wide-spread
1 dominion,

Or to engage in some feud with a neighbor and, com-
ing off victor,

Harry his rival to death and then seize upon all his
possessions.

Yet unto him at last tidings of Bordoni's daughter
were wafted,

And, in a moment when 'customed delights seemed to
pall on his spirit,

Thoughts of Bianca Bordoni came into his mind and
he wondered

What she was like and if all that was said of her pic-
tured her truly.

With Cosmo Alberti to think was to act, and thus
happ'd it Firenze
Saw him one day in her streets, unto which he had
long been a stranger,
Saw him and greeted him kindly, as Florentine pru-
dence suggested;
Nor was it long before he of the Villa Alberti was
granted
Sight of the maiden the fame of whose charms had
lured him from his castle.

Pietro Brignoli, whose daughter a noble young Pisan
had wedded,
Gave on the day of the bridal a banquet to which were
invited
All of the rank and the wealth of Firenze and likewise
were summoned
Strangers of rank from without, and amongst these was
Cosmo Alberti.
Handsome was he in his costume well-fitting his station
and figure,
Marked among men would he be anywhere, and full
many a maiden
Gazing upon him felt something of love stir within her
for Cosmo,
Cosmo, whose eyes were for one, and one only, and
that one Bianca.

Singing was she when he saw her, a song that was made
for the bridal.

Sweet were the words of the song, for sweet love was
the theme of the writer,

Guido Donati his name, and the words of his song
were on this wise :

What is the dearest of treasures ?

What is the sweetest of pleasures ?

Bliss that o'errunneth all measures ?

Love is its name. It is Love !

Sweet is the bliss of pursuing,

Dear is the joy of the wooing ;

Happiness lies in subduing

Hearts that are strangers to Love.

Whispered its vows are and tender ;

Virtue its strongest defender ;

Every true heart longs to render

Homage and honors to Love.

Ended the music, arose a great clamor of eloquent
voices

Praising the song and the singer and loudest was
Cosmo Alberti's.

Ne'er had he known until now these emotions that
filled him with longing ;

Never till now had he felt what it was to love purely
and nobly.

Love for the moment transformed his rough nature to
chivalrous manhood,

Lent a new grace to his manner and softened the ring
of his laughter.

Scarce would the servants of Villa Alberti have known
their young master

Could they have seen him that evening at Messer
Pietro Brignoli's.

After the banquet the bridegroom and bride led the
dancing together,

And in their steps followed gladly the Florentin
maidens and gallants,

Crossing, recrossing, and turning wherever the meas-
ure demanded,

Touching the tips of the fingers and bowing at every
turning.

Not the least graceful was Cosmo Alberti, who, joining
the dancers,

Joyfully found himself frequently facing Bianca
Bordoni,

Who for her part was well-pleased when she noted the
handsome Alberti

ying her every movement and eagerly craving her favor.

ong was the dance but it ended at length and the dancers departed,

Cosmo amongst them, his thoughts full of Bordoni's beautiful daughter,

Whom he determined to gain, and he therefore remained in Firenze

Week after week, and so constant was he in attending all banquets

Whereto Bianca was bidden that every one saw his devotion.

"See what a tamer is Love," said the gossips in strada and loggia ;

"Who would have dreamed that the savage young boar of the Villa Alberti

Would have forsaken his sports and his fighting for love of a maiden."

Not unobserved by Bordoni the evident purpose of Cosmo,

Purpose that had for its object the gaining the love of his daughter,

And not ill-pleased was the father, who viewed young Alberti with favor.

As for Bianca herself she but faintly at this time remembered

Tales she had heard of his deeds and his temper so cruel,

For when his face was before her they seemed like the
veriest fancies
Born of the envy of those not so handsome and daring
as Cosmo.
So as the summer departed and Tuscany's autumn de-
scending
Touched with the finger of fire all the trees in the
plain of the Arno,
Cosmo, not doubting Bianca's affection, demanded of
Luigi
Hand of the maiden in marriage, whereat old Bordoni,
concealing
Back of his calmness of face all the joy that he felt,
for a moment
Seemed not to favor distinctly the suit of the ardent
young Cosmo,
But as if moved by the arguments earnestly urged by
the other,
Yielded at last, as doth one overborne, and consented.
Then gladly
Hastened the passionate Cosmo to gentle Bianca await-
ing
News of her lover's success and as they sat together in
silence,
Fuller of meaning than words could be ever, Luigi
Bordoni,
Dignified, portly and handsome in garments of riches
black velvet,

Came where they sat and spoke gravely of life and its
manifold duties,
Spoke of the pain at his heart that would follow the
loss of Bianca,
Spoke of the rumors that reached him of Cosmo's un-
disciplined temper,
Urged the young noble to govern his household and
people with kindness,
Said a few words of the happiness marriage had brought
to his own life,
Hoped for as much in their future, and left them at
length with his blessing.

Fixed was the bridal for April, and all through the winter
young Cosmo
Busied himself with restoring a wing of the Villa Al-
berti,
Rearing a tower and extending the loggia and planning
out gardens,
Gardens which now are a wildwood, yet peopled with
moss-covered statues,
Showing, however, though armless and shattered, the
lines of the beauty
Fixed there of old by the wonderful skill of some long-
vanished sculptor.
So passed the winter with Cosmo, who, full of his plans

Found little time for pursuing old feuds with his neighbors, who therefore
Dwelt for the winter in peace and most fervently thanked the occasion.
Easter came early in April that season but not till the springtide
Filled the Val d'Arno with tremulous greenness and starred it with blossoms,
While on Fiesole's heights waved the newly-won sprays of the chestnut,
Sprays through which flickered the sunshine on pink-flushing buds of the laurel.
Nor was the brightness of Tuscany's springtime confined to the country,
Strada, piazza and loggia in every part of Firenze
Brimmed and ran over with flowers, and at Easter their delicate fragrance
Conquered at mass and at vespers the odors of myrrh and frankincense
Stealing from censers of brass swung by thurifers at the high altars.
Scarcely had Holy Week passed when the rigors of Lent were forgotten,
Save by the monks in their cells and the nuns in their cloisters,
For in the Easter week happened the wedding at Casa

EC Wedding long talked of before by the youth and the
maids of Firenze,
T Bridal long talked of thereafter because of its wonder-
ful splendor.
S Not for a decade at least had been seen in the City of
Flowers
Marriage attended with jubilant mirth and with pomp
like to this one.
Guests from Siena and Lucca and Pisa and Rome the
Eternal,
Brilliant in silks and in velvets and flashing with gold
chains and jewels,
Sat at the banquet that followed the solemn high mass
at the Duomo,
Sat beside Florentine nobles as richly arrayed, and
among them
Grey-bearded priors of arts and stout matrons who
once had been shapely,
Maidens as stately as lilies and children half-dazed
with the splendor,
Mingled in friendliness born of the joy that abounds at
a bridal.
Many the healths that were drunk in behalf of the
newly-wed couple ;
Many the wishes expressed for their happiness and to
these Cosmo
Gracefully worded his thanks, and, the banquet once
ended, the dancing

Followed it swiftly, but even more rapidly twinkled to
music

Feet of the dancers in rhythmical measures, and lastly
succeeded

Chorus of youths and of maidens with clear ringing
voices all singing,

(Melody wondrous and sweet,) a fair marriage song writ
for the bridal :

When in the springtime a soft wind arises
Out of the south land and sweetly surprises
Fair folded buds from their sleep into roses,
Breathes on the lily till rathe it uncloses,
Hearts that are saddest lose some of their sorrow,
Hearts that are lightest a keener joy borrow,
When in the springtime a south wind arises
And in its bounty all fair gifts comprises.

When in the springtime two hearts are united,
Pleasure is crowned and dull pain is affrighted,
Love lights the path where the blissful ones wander
Thinking no evil and growing yet fonder.
Never such rapture by mortals is tasted
As clings to the days when ere April is wasted,
Pain being past and all jealousy blighted,
Hearts in the dearest of bonds are united.

So the long waiting was over and these two, Bianca
and Cosmo,
Entered upon that new life which to some is a quickly
sped pleasure
Vanished as soon as the moon of the bridal is over and
nothing
Left for the lifetime which follows but weariness, hatred
and loathing,
But which for others is full of the joy that endureth for
all time,
Joy that is sister to peace and abideth forever in calm-
ness.
How it would be with these two was the wonder of
half of Firenze
Holding in mind the reports of his pitiless temper
aforetime.
Somewhat disturbed in his spirit was ancient Luigi
Bordoni
Sitting alone in his palace bereft of Bianca and doubt-
ing
Whether ambition were safest to follow when wedding
a daughter
Tender and loving as his was, and whether young Cosmo
Alberti
Loved her enough to subdue for her sake all his out-
bursts of passion.
Often and often he rode to the gates of the Villa Alberti,

Entered and found in the gardens or sitting at ease in
the loggia

Happiness ever and blissful content with Bianca and
Cosmo.

Welcome he never found lacking and so as the days
journeyed onward

Fainter his doubtings became and at last past away
altogether

Utterly routed and slain by the radiant presence of
gladness.

Now in these halcyon days the great happiness com-
passing these two

Spread its white wings over all who owed service to
Cosmo.

Wholly transformed seemed the man through his love
for the gentle Bianca.

It was enough for him now that she pleaded for any re-
tainer,

Seeking for justice to all, and the noble who once had
sought counsel

Only from whim of the moment or spurring of sudden-
moved passion,

Now was renowned throughout spacious Val d'Arno
for merciful dealing.

Many the banquets and feastings at Villa Alberti that
summer.

Often the peasant on lands of Alberti was roused from
his slumbers

Nigh to the hour when the pale rose of dawn in the
east faintly quickens,

Hearing the rolling of wheels and the querulous neigh-
ing of horses

Speeding with jubilant revelers back to their homes in
Firenze.

All who could add to the joy of the moment were wel-
comed by Cosmo.

So at the Villa Alberti were gathered in friendly
conjunction

Poets, musicians and artists of differing orders of merit,
Nobles and sages and men who were keen at a jest or
a satire.

There might be seen the fair matrons and maids of the
City of Florence,

Cassock of priest, or the purple-hued robe of the digni-
fied prelate,

Merchants returned from a visit to Paris or far-distant
London,

Courtiers from France or ambassadors sent from some
German dominion.

Many the faiths of the guests but a harmony never was
lacking,

For at these meetings Bianchi and Neri forgot for the
moment

Matters at issue between them, and even the Ghibel-
line faction

Here at the Villa Alberti held truce with the Guelphs
their opponents,

Glad it would seem for an interval sacred to peace
and good feeling.

When the fierce heats of the summer were over and
Tuscany's autumn

Once more returning had purpled the vineyards and
yellowed the cornfields,

Veiled with a haze the far peaks of Carrara and
breathed forth at evening

Hints, though but faint ones as yet, of the oncoming
chillier weather,

Luigi Bordoni one morning rode forth to his daughter
Bianca's,

Not, as his wont was, alone, but companioned upon this
occasion

By a fair youth, the last left of the sons of a dearly-
loved brother.

Nearly two years had he been at Ferrara on business
of Luigi's,

But it was ended at last and the youth had returned to
Firenze

Only that morning brimful of rejoicing at seeing his
kindred.

Joyous the meeting had been 'twixt the uncle and well-beloved nephew,
And in reply to his questionings after Bianca, his cousin,
Messer Bordoni was leading the youth to the Villa Alberti.
Scarce twenty-one was Franceso Bordoni when leaving Firenze ;
Lightly at that time the down on his upper lip lay like a shadow,
But, in his absence had lengthened and darkened till now on returning
Straight as a dart a full finger's length sideways it slenderly pointed,
Under it gleamed the white teeth that his clear ringing laughter showed often,
And 'neath the forehead above it two dark eyes looked honestly outward,
Eyes that the maids of Ferrara had many times loved to feel on them.
Slenderly built was the youth but withal of an elegant figure,
Habited richly in garments befitting his years and his station.
Crimson and white was his doublet and likewise his close-fitting long hose
Crimson of hue, and a mantle that carelessly hung from his shoulder

White, with a lining of crimson, showed also the colors
he favored.

Crimson moreover the cap that he wore and that
poised as if blown there

Crowning the grace that yet needed no help of costume
to display it.

Over his doublet there hung a gold chain wrought by
skill of Cellini,

And at his side was a sword which the same Benvenuto
Cellini,

Seized with a master's own fancy, enriched with a
wonderful scabbard

Where was depicted the sorrowful story of her of
Rimini.

Goodly in raiment and person alike was the youthful
Francesco,

And as he journeyed that morning along with his
uncle, Luigi

Said to himself that the youth was a joy to the house
of Bordoni.

Noon was the hour when the uncle and nephew reached
Villa Alberti ;

Noon, and the shadows that lay on the greensward
were dwarfed and misshapen ;

Noon, and the breezes of morning had died quite away
into stillness ;

Noon, and the birds were asleep and the musical plash
of the fountains

Joyously leaping aloft in the sunshine and falling back
ever

Scarce broke the slumberous silence that brooded o'er
all like a blessing.

“ Ah, what a haven of peace ! ” said Franceso aloud to
his uncle,

“ Truly a fitting abode for my beautiful cousin Bianca.”
Hardly the sentence was uttered when she whom he
spoke of came forward

Beaming with joy at beholding her father and long-
absent cousin.

“ Surely, Franceso, your stay in Ferrara has wondrously
changed you,

For when you left us you seemed like a boy and to-day
I behold you

Bearing the honors of manhood like any young Floren-
tine gallant.”

Smiling she spoke and the youth in confusion bowed
lowly before her,

Paused for a moment and then answered gayly, “ My
cousin Bianca,

Time has been busy with you and has changed from a
girl to a woman

Her whom I left in the care of the vigilant Sisters of
Joseph,

Learning from them to embroider and also the curing
of roseleaves."

More had he said, but the master of Villa Alberti ap-
proaching

Greeted the newcomers warmly and led the way into
the Villa.

There for a time they conversed with each other of
various matters,

Whether the eloquent Savonarola would preach at the
Duomo

After the autumn was over and Advent had opened the
winter,

Whether the turbulent Arrabbiati would dare to molest
him,

Whether the harvests throughout the Val d' Arno were
promising finely,

Whether the air of Firenze was purer than that of
Ferrara.

So passed the morning away until Cosmo, addressing
Bianca,

Said in his courtliest manner, "Bianca, your cousin
Francesco,

If he has rested as long as he wishes, might care to
examine

Under your guidance the gardens, or possibly also the
frescos

Painted last spring, my Bianca, in honor of you and our
bridal.

Go with him therefore, I pray you, and I and our excellent father

Later will join you, perhaps in the gardens or else in the loggia."

Ended his sentence, the speaker arose and passed out with Luigi

Full of some plan for adorning the Villa which needed explaining,

And at an opposite portal Bianca went forth with her cousin.

Much had Francesco to speak of concerning the years of his absence ;

Much had Bianca to tell him of Cosmo and how he adored her.

Almost like brother and sister the cousins had been in their childhood,

Sharing their joys and their sorrows and each one admiring the other.

Now as they loitered in arbor and alley in innocent converse,

Confidence, long interrupted by absence, returned, and the friendship

Severed by time reunited and freely they spoke to each other ;

He of the maiden he loved at Ferrara with ardent devotion,

How he would count himself happy if only Bianca might see her,

For he was sure she would think the maid wondrously lovely.

When he had ended she told of her meeting with Cosmo last summer,

How she had loved from the first this young lord whom Pietro Brignoli

Summoned with others to dance and to feast at the fête of his daughter.

How she had feared while she loved him, recalling the tales that were told her,

Tales that proclaimed him as cruel, and wholly unmindful of kindness,

But unto her he was gentle and tender, and courteous ever.

Since they were wedded his love had not lost in the least its deep fervor,

And his dependents united, she added, in praising their master.

“Happier woman than I am most surely is none in Firenze,”

Gleefully ended Bianca her story of Cosmo’s devotion.

Thus as it happened the youthful and handsome Francesco Bordoni,

Once more abiding with Luigi his uncle, in Casa Bordoni,

Welcome most cordial received from his cousin the
 wife of Alberti,
Welcome in which Cosmo joined with the zeal of
 impetuous natures.
Frequent the journeys he made from Firenze to Villa
 Alberti,
For as the autumn departed the beautiful maid of
 Ferrara,
Wholly unknown to herself, was supplanted by one in
 Firenze,
Wherefore Francesco the fickle had much to impart to
 his cousin
Of the new rapture he fervently vowed should endure
 for a lifetime.
Smilingly listened Bianca and wholly refrained from
 reproaching,
Feeling quite sure that his heart was untouched by the
 one or the other ;
Hoping moreover in time to divert his uncertain affec-
 tions
Into a steadier channel and fix them on one of her own
 friends,
Giulia Donati, the well-beloved child of a Florentine
 noble.
So the youth went and returned at his pleasure, and
 sober-paced autumn
Glided unseen into winter, so mild was the weather,
 and Cosmo

Welcomed him always as one might a brother and
dreamed of no evil.

So might it ever have been but for one who had noted
Francesco

Coming and going at will and moreover seen oft with
Bianca.

Into the brain of Battista Marchesi, a friend of Alberti's,

Entered suspicion at once as a guest and found ample
employment,

When he beheld the young nephew of ancient Luigi
Bordoni

Gladly received by Bianca, against whom he cherished
resentment

Dating from days when he sued as a lover and won not
her favor.

Long had he sighed for revenge and the moment for
this seemed approaching.

Cautious, however, was he, and he waited some time
before speaking,

But when December was come and Battista was hunting with Cosmo,

Far from Firenze on slopes of the Apennine Alps near
Carrara,

Chance as it seemed led their talk to Bianca and Villa Alberti.

"Ah, 'tis a week since I left my Bianca!" said Cosmo,
"and lonely

Truly I know she will be, so to-morrow must find me
returning."

"Lonely, good Cosmo?" then answered him crafty
Marchesi, "but surely

That is your vanity speaking. Bianca can very well
spare you,

Just for a little at least, for what wife will not tire of
her husband

Having him constantly by her and hearing his words of
devotion.

Then she has with her the beautiful Giulia Donati and
likewise

Paola Lippi and other fair maids of Firenze and
doubtless

Handsome Franceso Bordoni is there at the Villa this
moment

Telling some wonderful tale or exciting their mirth by
his jesting.

O, she is doing quite well in your absence without you,
good Cosmo.

Better remain while the hunting is good than to think
of returning.

She is quite safe in the care of her friends and her
cousin Franceso."

Loudly laughed Cosmo when subtle Battista had finished, and answered :

"Little you know of Bianca's affection for me, good
Battista ;

She is not like many wives who rejoice when their husbands are absent ;

Ever her thoughts are of me and I surely must see her to-morrow."

"Take your own course, my dear friend," said Battista, in answer, "and doubtless

You are quite right and Bianca, your wife, in your absence is lonely.

Pardon me, Cosmo, if I in a moment of jesting spoke lightly

Of the affection a wife like Bianca must feel for her husband.

Let it forever be buried and now let us speak of Francesco ;

Surely a more pleasant subject is he with his easy good-nature.

How half the maids in Firenze adore him, and yet 'tis no wonder ;

Who might not conquer and win the most obdurate heart in the city

Had he the graces of person and eloquent tongue of Francesco.

Even the matrons regard him with pleasure and almost affection.

Almost, said I, nay 'tis rumored that one or two matrons whose husbands

Absent just now are from home, seem disposed to the granting of favors

Unto Franceso, the handsome, which doubtless the
youth has accepted,
Being adept in affairs of the kind, if I do not mistake
him.

Ah, what it is to be handsome and young and thus
favored of women !”

Thus unto Cosmo spoke wily Marchesi and failed not
to notice

Over the brow of the friend at his side a dark shadow
was creeping ;

Noticed and inly rejoiced and continued his talk of
Franceso,

Praising the youth as before and enlarging upon his
attractions.

Then as a close to his words very craftily added, “ My
Cosmo,

You should know best and no doubt you are right in
returning to-morrow.

Truly so tender and loving a wife as is yours must be
lonely.

Go if you will, as for me I will hunt by myself awhile
longer.”

Little said Cosmo the rest of that day to his friend and
companion.

Dark was his brow as the clouds that drive over the
sky in a tempest ;

Heavy his heart with the weight of suspicion that sud-
denly lodged there ;

So on the morrow he turned his face eastward and
reached home at nightfall.

Peaceful and quiet the short day had passed for Bianca
Alberti

Busied with womanly cares and with no one at hand
to distract her.

Paola Lippi with Giulia had ere this returned to
Firenze,

And on that day quite alone had she been till Fran-
cesco at sunset

Came to the Villa to beg her assistance in gaining the
favor

Of his last love, the adorable, wonderful Giulia Donati.
Glad was Bianca to find where his wishes now pointed
and promised

All in her power to incline to his suit the dear friend
of her girlhood.

Loud was the youth in his thanks as they sat in the
loggia together

While the bright moonlight streamed over their faces
and one in the garden

Watched them with wrath in his heart and a tremulous
hand on his dagger.

So passed an hour, and Francesco departing sped
down to the garden

Trusting to find at the entrance his charger awaiting
its master.

Crimson and white was his garb as of old, and his cap
with its tassel
Lightly was tossed on a head that was full of a lover's
bright fancies.
Singing a song was the youth as he passed down the
garden, and Cosmo,
Wholly unheeded by him, came behind with his dagger
and ended
With but one thrust the sweet song and the harmless
young life of the singer.
Crimson and white were the colors Francesco in life
had most favored ;
Crimson and white in his death lay the blithesome
Francesco Bordoni.

Long had lain dormant the turbulent passions of
Cosmo Alberti ;
Dormant and harmless they seemed until roused by the
wily Battista.
Fiercer than ever the tempest that now raged un-
checked in his bosom,
Tempest awakened at first by the devilish craft of
Marchesi,
Tempest now roused to full height when before him
lay lifeless Francesco.
Dragging Bordoni away from the path he strode up to
the Villa,

Entered and meeting his most trusted servant, Arnolfo
Sacchetti,
Told him in brief what had chanced and then charged
him to keep the dread secret,
Bidding him also to safely conceal the dead form of
Francesco ;
Then with a smile on his lips straightway passed to the
rooms of Bianca.
Glad was Bianca when Cosmo she saw and most tender
her welcome,
Tender moreover was he and the fire that had now
blazed so hotly,
Seemed to have sunk into ashes so loving and gentle
his manner.
Doubted he then for a moment, so genuine seemed her
affection,
Whether the deed were well done that had ended the
life of Francesco,
Till there returned the suspicions Marchesi in him had
implanted.
But to Bianca his look at that time betrayed nothing
but gladness
And in her joy at his coming no mention she made of
Francesco
Even when days past away and no more was he seen
at the Villa.
Absent just then from Firenze was Luigi Bordoni, his
uncle,

So that the youth was not missed from the city except
by companions

Young like himself, and who fancied him absent on
some lover's journey.

Troubled in spirit was Cosmo, perceiving no trace in
Bianca

Of the dismay he had looked for when day after day
brought no lover,

Troubled in spirit, yet not the less fixed in his direful
purpose,

Purpose which waited in silence the moment most fit
for disclosing.

More than a week past away when one morning
Bianca said lightly :

“What can have chanced to Francesco? He seems to
have left us entirely.

When you were absent, my Cosmo, he came every day
to the Villa.

That was when Giulia Donati was here, whom he loves
beyond measure.”

“He will be with us this even at supper,” said Cosmo
in answer,

“Full of a lover's excuses, no doubt, to account for his
absence.”

Even was come and together they past to the hall of
the banquet,

Where on the table a cover was laid for the coming
Francesco.

"Shall we not drink to the health of your amorous
cousin, Bianca,
Ere he arrives at the Villa?" and gladly Bianca
assented.

Then at a sign from his master Arnolfo Sacchetti
brought forward

Rarest of wines and moreover a silver-rimmed skull
for a goblet.

This to Bianca he gave and Alberti said gently,
"Bianca,

It is a fancy of mine you should drink from that goblet
this evening.

Not the most pleasant of fancies, 'tis true, but you will
not refuse me?"

Somewhat reluctant at first, but assured by the words of
her husband,

Quickly she drank and Arnolfo Sacchetti announced
at that moment,

"Messer Francesco Bordoni," and opened the doors of
a closet.

There with a mantle of crimson and white hanging
loose from the shoulder

Stood a grim skeleton awful and white in the down-
streaming lamplight.

Frozen with horror Bianca stared rigidly forward while
Cosmo,

Eying her sternly, burst forth in his passion: "Your
lover, Francesco,

Waits for you there in his closet: why linger so long
ere you greet him?

That is his skull which you drank from, a pleasing love-
token he sends you:

Strange that you shrink from him now whom you lately
preferred to your husband:

What? have you nothing to say to the amorous youth
who adores you?"

Slowly Bianca arose and then turning to Cosmo said
firmly:

"Never in word or in deed have I sinned 'gainst the
bond that unites us:

Him you have slain was no lover of mine. I was
yours and yours only.

Happy was I in your love and I foolishly deemed it
eternal.

Were I the woman you think, I might readily crave
your forgiveness;

Being the innocent wife that I am, I now leave you
forever."

Scarcely the sentence was uttered ere she who had
spoken fell lifeless,

Dying heart-broken, and he whose accusings had sud-
denly killed her,

Stood there alone, for Sacchetti had vanished, alone
with Bianca.

Now when too late he believed in her innocence wholly,
entirely ;
Now when too late he perceived the abominable craft
of Marchesi ;
Now in his anguish, by furies pursued, he fled into the
forest.

Empty the Villa Alberti henceforward, for no one
would dwell there.
Gone was its master and no one knew whither for
many years after,
Till as it happened a hunter pursuing a deer near
Carrara,
Found in a desolate hollow two skeletons lying to-
gether,
Locked in a deadly embrace, and by shreds of their
clothing and jewels,
Knew them for Cosmo Alberti and crafty Battista
Marchesi.

The Golden Lotus.



*In far Japan this story old
Is carved in ivory, graved in brass,
For jealous Fame, who loves the bold,
Lest not the gracious memory pass.*

THE LEGEND OF THE GOLDEN LOTUS.

THE amber sunset faded into night,
And round the base of lofty Dandoku
The ever-present shadows in the woods
Clung closer to the forest depths, yet rose,
Still clinging, from the mountain's shaggy knees
To shining cone of snow that pierced the sky,
And still and breathless grew the darkened land.
Slow past the hours till in the east faint lights
Wavered awhile, then eddied into calm
And waxed apace, and from their midst, blood-red,
An angry moon sailed up a cloudless sky,
And all the peering shadows backward pressed,
Each upon other, ever clustering thick
To rearward of each bush and tree. But when
The blood-red splendor of the moon had paled
To white, and long and level rays became
Long rays that sloped from heaven's mid-height, there
past
Down Dandoku's steep sides the merciful
Shaka-ni-yorai, full of holy thoughts.

No sound yet broke the silence, save when now
And then a stone, dislodged by Shaka's steps,
Smote sharply 'gainst its neighbor rocks, or bird,
Half-roused by passing feet, fluttered a wing
Or chirped a sleepy note.

No sound save these,
Till rose from out a jagged mountain cleft
A mystic voice that rang around the sky
And trembled to the limits of the world,
Proclaiming one of Buddha's sacred truths:
*Not always does the outward guise denote
The complex substance of the inner soul!*
Lord Shaka, hearing, paused, then nearer drew
Toward the cleft, and peering downward, saw
A dragon on whose scales the moonbeams shone,
And in whose eyes there glittered baleful fires.
No fear beset his soul at this strange sight,
But all unawed thereat, he by the edge
Sat down and questioned of the awful shape
Below, whence came this knowledge of the laws,
Which years of study had not shown to him.
"Knowing so much," said Shaka, "thou must needs
Know more. I wait thy farther word. Say on."
So saying, Shaka sat with joinèd palms,
Patiently waiting, while the dragon coiled
Its awful glistening length around the cliff,

And once more shook with thunders all the air,
As it, regarding Shaka's face serene,
Declared: *All things that live to Buddha are
Opposed!* There followed silence for a space,
Till Shaka said, "All that is good thou sayest,
All that is good, and yet I wait for more."

He ceased, and suddenly a soundless chill
Crept o'er the mountain side, and one dark cloud,
Coming from farthest space, enwrapt the moon,
And in the chill and through the gloom he heard
The awful voice, clear-sounding: *All that live
Must die!* And like an echo come from far
And fainter: *All that live must die!*

Thereat

The listener bowed himself and said: "Thy mouth
Hast spoken greater wisdom than before.
O clothed with knowledge, still, I pray, say on!"
So spake Lord Shaka, and the shape below
Turned full on him the lightnings of its eyes,
And answered: "Lo, the last of these great truths
Most precious is of all the four, but weak
Am I, and may not utter it without
The meat I most desire," and while he spoke
The moon from out the bosom of the cloud
Came forth, and showed the dragon loosening
Its hold upon the rock, and all its length

Supinely stretching forth.

Then Shaka said :

“ O thou so full of highest wisdom art
I can deny thee nothing. Name thy will.”
Whereat the dragon, rearing high his crest,
Made answer like the roll of thunder heard
Far off in wake of a retreating storm,
“ Man’s flesh.”

All pityingly Lord Shaka gazed
Upon the dragon, and made answer thus :
“ The Law forbids us to destroy a life,
But for the people whom I hope to teach
The fourth great sentence I must hear for them ;
Thereafter will I give myself to thee.
And now, O Wisdom-Bearer, tell me all.”

The dragon heard, and higher raised its head,
And slowly opening its ponderous jaws,
Made answer to Lord Shaka : *Happiness*
Is greatest when the soul the body leaves !

Rapt on these words the saintly hearer stood
A space, then reverently bowed his head
And sprang within the dragon’s mouth, when lo,
A wonder ! As Lord Shaka’s sacred feet
Touched lightly on the shining monster’s jaws

The crested head sank down and fell apart
Eight several ways, and into petals eight
That form the throne most holy briefly past
And left Lord Shaka seated, calm, serene,
Within the bosom of the Mystic Flower!

Lyrics, etc.

*Why turn the page? There's nought o'erleaf
To hold attent your thoughtful mind.
You will? 'Tis well these lays are brief,
If to disparage you're inclined.*

LYRICS, ETC.

THE SWEET SOUTH-WIND.

OVER the fields and the waters there suddenly swept in
mid-April

Something that seemed like a breath that was blown
from far coasts of the sunlands.

Languorous was it and sweet as are lilies or odorous
spices,

Laden with delicate hints of a summer not far in the
distance.

Over the meadows and fields that, embrowned by the
cold of the winter,

Lay as if dead to the spring and with never a hope of
a harvest,

Silently passed the south-wind, and there suddenly
sprang into being

Millions of grass blades that tossed like an emerald sea
in the sunshine,

Daffodils fair as were those that gained Pluto a consort
in Hades,

Buttercups golden and gleaming like gems on the hands
of a maiden,
Daisies that grew near the ground and yet ever and al-
ways gazed upward,
Violets azure and yellow and white and of wonderful
fragrance.

Over the trees in the orchard and forest it breathed in
its progress,
Bringing the sap from the roots to the near and the
farthestmost branches,
Swelling the buds till the willow was hid in a verdurous
mist-cloud,
Touching the boughs of the maple that reddened with
joy at the meeting,
Leaving wherever it lingered assurance and promise of
summer.
Over the streams the beneficent breeze from the south-
land swept gently,
Filled all the waters with quick-darting life that rejoiced
in the springtime,
Sent all the rivers, now freed from the grasp of the
winter, exultant,
Moving in shimmering, glittering, sinuous curves that
led seaward.

So on its way passed the wonderful wakening wind from
the sunlands,
Driving before it the frost and the cold of the winter,
reluctant,
While in their stead came the warmth and the re-
aroused life of the springtide,
For in the wake of the life-giving breeze flew the jubi-
lant swallows,
Twittered the robins and wrens, while the azure-hued
wing of the bluebird
Cut through the air like the scintillant blade that is
famed of Toledo.

Thus in mid-April the heart of another springtide was
awakened ;
Faster the blood ran along through the veins in the
glorious weather,
Generous impulses quickened and waxed in the glow of
the season.
Winter was banished, and with him the cold and the
afternoon twilight,
And, as the wail of his storms in the north passed at
last into silence,
May could be seen in the distance approaching, her lap
full of blossoms.

ON THE LABRADOR COAST.

(OCTOBER, 1885.)

DOWN the coast of Labrador
Rode the storm-wind conqueror :
In his train the surges roared,
From black clouds the torrents poured.
Miles on miles of frowning cliffs
Marked with Time's strange hieroglyphs
Felt the waves their bases shock,
Heard strange cries that seemed to mock
With their shrill discordant glee
Sounds of human agony.
Drifting wildly with the blast
Scores of vessels southward past.
Down upon their rain-swept decks
Leaped the surges with white necks ;
Thundered on their oaken sides
Angry force of mighty tides,
And through shrieking rigging tore
Fiercest gales that fled to shore.
On to land the vessels sped,
On to death the storm-wind led,

Miles on miles of blackened cliffs
Saw the helpless, feeble skiffs
Swung from schooners' sides and then
Oared by stout-armed fishermen,
Shattered, broken at their feet :
Heard mad waves the dirge repeat
Of the men who met their doom
Where the wildest surges boom
When along stern Labrador
Rides the storm-wind conqueror !

WHAT'S THE SWEETEST NEWS IN SPRING?

WHAT's the sweetest news in spring
That the blithesome swallows bring,
When from southern lands they fly
Through our cloudier northern sky
After frosts and cold succumb?
"April's past and May has come!"

April's past and May has come!
One may hear it in the hum
Of the silly bees that seek
Honey from the petals meek
Of the violet and the daisy;
See it in the curving, hazy,
Vaporous line that marks a river
Winding slow where rushes quiver;
Feel it in the thrill that stirs
All the Maytide's messengers.

May is come and April's past!
Joy of spring is here at last;
One may hear it in the note
Swelling from the bluebird's throat;

See it in the rosy snow
Heaped along the orchard row;
Feel it in the odors stealing
Forth from lily-banks revealing
Mid green spears small waxen bells.
Every sense the message tells
May is come and April's past;
Summer gladness ripens fast.

April's past and May is come!
Greening woods no more are dumb;
Every tree is vocal now;
Every winter-twisted bough
Hides its scars with leaf or flower.
Now is come the fairest hour
Held in fee of all the year;
Winds breathe low and skies are clear;
Neither cold nor heat can smite;
All sweet influences unite
In the Maytide hour to make
Earth seem sweeter for our sake.
Who the winter's cold remembers
Or believes in drear Novembers
When of joy this is the sum, —
April's past and May has come?
That's the sweetest news in spring
Which the happy swallows bring.

FRANCESCA AND PAOLO.

IN that dim-lighted land where bide
The spirits who have sinned below,
One newly come saw by her glide,
In silence mournfully and slow,
That other who upon her turned
Sad eyes that alway swam in tears,
And moved dry lips that constant burned
With kisses never through the years
Of dateless æons to be kissed.
Forever doomed the one to see
Her loved Paolo near, and list
In vain for loving words ; to be
Forever witness of his pain,
And look and long for aye to ease
The anguish of his heart. Sad twain !
What lovers' torments like to these ?

WHERE ARE THE PIPES OF PAN?

IN these prosaic days
Of politics and trade,
When seldom Fancy lays
Her touch on man or maid,
The sounds are fled that strayed
Along sweet streams that ran ;
Of song the world's afraid ;
Where are the Pipes of Pan ?

Within the busy maze
Wherein our feet are stayed,
There roam no gleesome fays
Like those which once repaid
His sight who first essayed
The stream of song to span,
Those spirits all are laid.
Where are the Pipes of Pan ?

Dry now the poet's bays ;
Of song-robcs disarrayed
He hears not now the praise
Which erst those won who played
On pipes of rushes made,
Before dull days began
And love of song decayed.
Where are the Pipes of Pan ?

Envoy.

Prince, all our pleasures fade ;
Vain all the toils of man ;
And Fancy cries dismayed,
"Where are the Pipes of Pan ?"

SONG.

IF you love me, come and be
In my heart of hearts and see
How I think of naught but thee !

If you hate me, tell me so,
I should love you still, I know, —
Hate to love will sometimes grow.

If you neither love nor hate,
For your grace I ne'er will wait ;
You will never be my fate !

TO A FRIEND WHO DELAYS TO WRITE.

SPRINGTIME goes,
Comes the rose, —
 Ne'er a letter yet!

Summer's reign
O'er again, —
 Still he doth forget!

Autumn fast
Slideth past, —
 Can he mean to let

Winter drear
End the year, —
 End, and still forget?

A VALENTINE.

THERE is a little maid
Of whom I'm much afraid.
 Shall I confess it?
She wears a sealskin coat;
Its grace and shape I note
 And needs must bless it.

She wears a little bonnet:
A bird that's perched upon it
 To fly seems ready.
My heart, not over-bold,
When her I do behold,
 Goes quite unsteady.

She has a little muff
In which, from breezes rough,
 Her hands find shelter.
My wits, when her I see
Clad all so daintily,
 Fly helter-skelter.

Who is this little maid
Of whom I'm so afraid?
Dare I reveal it?
This little maid is she
Whose eyes these verses see;
I can't conceal it.

But if she should divine
I'd be her valentine,
As here I sing it,
I'll dare to hope she may
Be surely mine some day.
Sweet skies, soon bring it.

MIDSUMMER PASSES.

WITH faltering step the sweet Midsummer paused
Upon the last stair of the worn July.
Behind her blushed the roses and before
The scarlet poppies shimmered in the corn.
From far-off woods a heated breath came past,
Blown from dark cedars and tall groves of pine,
Yet all its sweetness might not serve to soothe
The bitterness of fair Midsummer's pain,
Who felt her sceptre slipping from her grasp
And saw one coming with his heated brows
Girt round with wheatstraws, bold young August brown.

*FAIR FRIENDSHIP RAISED HIS PLACID
MASK.*

FAIR Friendship raised his placid mask and showed
Beneath, not brows where calm Content should reign,
Nor smiles wherein all-perfect Joy abode,
But Discord's face, distort with many a pain !

AN EASTER GRIEF.

THE Easter brightness fades away ;
A chill has numbed the bursting leaf ;
A shadow falls across the day
And in our hearts is bitter grief.

UNTO LATE AUTUMNTIDE.

WITH lurid torch October fired the woods ;
Brief grew the days, and long and chill the nights ;
The birds flew southward and their songs made glad
No more the hours. Then changed the maple's gold
To russet brown. November's step was heard
Along the leafstrewn ways, and, blown by winds
And drenched by autumn rains, October fled
Before her down the path where summer went :
So waned the year to later autumntide.

WITH A PRAYER-BOOK.

IN Common Prayer our hearts ascend
To that white throne where angels bend.
Now grant, O Lord, that those who call
Themselves by Thy dear name may all
Show forth Thy praise in lives that tend

To noble purpose, lofty end,
And unto us thy blessing lend
As low upon our knees we fall
In Common Prayer.

In this dear Book past ages blend
Their voice with ours ; we do commend
Our souls, in doubt and sin held thrall,
To His fond care, and cot and hall
Alike to him petitions send
In Common Prayer.

ON TRURO SANDS.

TO W. M. F.

ON Truro sands we walked, dear friend,
Slow following up that low shore's trend.

The crescent moon dipt in the sea,
Soft darkness fell on you and me
As on we wandered past the bend

That marked the fishing hamlet's end,
And felt the breeze against us spend
Its gentle force. Ah, sweet to be

On Truro sands!

Some Presence did our steps attend
And to that hour a blessing lend,
So one in heart, my friend, were we,
And set from selfish fancies free.
How dull were life, that hour unkennd,

On Truro sands!

BEATEN.

WHERE is the spirit of striving that once was so strong
in my heart?

And where is the lofty devotion that attended my steps
at the start?

I was so full of my purpose and never gave way to a
doubt,

Never looked forward to failure, whatever dark clouds
were about,

Always believed in hard fighting, and never once
trusted to luck,

Put my whole soul in my doing, and honest each blow
that I struck.

What is the guerdon of labor, of honesty what the
reward?

Only a pittance at most, and simplicity conquered by
fraud.

Where is the joy of believing when faith is met by a
sneer?

Why should we look to the future expecting the skies
to be clear?

Always the strongest are prospered : why may it not be
so again,
If there's a heaven hereafter reserved for the children
of men?
Might has the best of us here, and may it not be so
beyond?
I who am vanquished in battle have little to do but
despond.
Never for me will the prospect be brightened again
by a hope ;
I have grown old in the conflict, and care not with evil
to cope.

Beaten am I in the struggle, the doom of the conquered
is mine ;
Darkness and clouds are about me, the morrow I may
not divine.
Now I await the dread moment when I shall have done
with it all,
When the long strife shall be ended, and I turn my
face to the wall.

Sonnets.



*How oft the sonnet's fourteen lines
Fail to convey the bardling's thought :
The poet in that space enshrines
Some theme with mighty meaning fraught.*



SONNETS.

RECONCILIATION.

As one who, wandering in a weary land
Alone, where thorns and briers beset the way,
And clouds and darkness have o'ercome the day,
Suddenly feels from out the dark a hand
In his, and hears a voice of mild command
At which the clouds disperse, the sunshine gay
Returns, and all within his heart is May
As forth he goes unto some happy strand, —

So I, in darkness groping, hear your voice
Again, and feel your hand in mine,
(For what is distance to true hearts that love ?)
And all my darkness ends, for at the sign
Of your forgiveness I once more rejoice
And feel sweet Peace descending like a dove.

INDIFFERENCE.

WHAT is indifference, do you ask of me ?

O well I know the meaning of the phrase.

It is to find grey ash instead of blaze
That warmed you once ; to lose, alas ! the key
Which turned in friendship's wards ; to sometime see
The eyes that shone for you in other days
Now coldly meet your own in passing gaze ;
To know that what has been no more shall be.

It is to find that you in naught believe,

To know that youth has fled far down the past,

To feel that hope will ne'er again be born,

And love is but a poor worn cheat at last.

It is all this, *yet not for this to grieve, —*

To live, and heed not that one lives forlorn !

EASTER-FRIDAY, 1883.

[In memory of J. T. F., who entered into rest on Friday in Easter-Week, 1882.]

O YEAR gone down into the sullen past,
Relentless year that hast no tidings brought
Of him who suddenly from earth was caught
And lifted higher while our tears fell fast ;
Thou canst not triumph over us at last,
Because thy silence so with grief is fraught
That joy is weighted with a mournful thought
When at this Easter eyes are backward cast ;

For, past all doubting, well each heart doth know,
Howe'er it fare with us whose heavy load
Each moment lends its petty might to swell,
With him no longer sorrow makes abode,
But peace and rest abide, and never go ;
And with his noble soul it now is well !

TO JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL.

WHAT rarer, finer bliss than his who feels,
While happy friends and neighbors press his hands,
The warmth of handclasps given in other lands
Still left upon his palms? Though o'er him steals
The rapture of home-coming, on its heels
Follows the joy of holding in the bands
Of memory all the hours whose golden sands
Were run with friends remote whom space conceals.

Such bliss is thine, O poet, coming back
After long absence from thy native shores :
For, while all England saddens with farewells,
Thine own dear land, expectant, opens doors
Of welcome wide for thee on homeward track,
And every voice the heartfelt greeting swells.

TO ONE WHO HAS SUFFERED MUCH.

I KNOW, dear friend, your hours are drear and cold ;
I know your path is harsh with briers and flints ;
Yet in the darkest day come happy glints
Of distant brightness underneath the fold
Of blackest cloud, and ever to the bold
The roughest road will show the faintest prints
Of weary feet. Look up ! When morning tints
Are in the sky the night grows pale and old.

The longest lane a sad world hath will turn
At last, and, round the turning, mayhap, waits
Some joy to greet you that shall fill your life
With bliss past all belief. Not always stern
The future, nearer seen. Sometimes the Fates
Do smile, and Peace comes surely after strife.

TO MODJESKA AS ROSALIND.

WHEN from the poet's brain fair Arden's glades
Were peopled with the lightsome folk we know,
A shade of discontent was seen to grow
Upon his brow, as he through long decades
In vision saw this loveliest of his maids
By beardless boys enacted, and her show
Of maiden grace obscured and hidden so
In guise of youths half-won from boyish trades.

Soon changed the vision, and through centuries far
A group of women fair he then did see,
Whose hearts, one after other, were beguiled
By some Orlando's youth and bravery,
And in the throng, and radiant as a star,
On *thee*, the mighty Master, looking, smiled!

TO MODJESKA AS JULIA OF VERONA.

THE tender maid of old Verona's town,
Whom Proteus loved and yet could lightly leave
When sight of Silvia did his soul bereave
Of friendship's dues and honor's fair renown,
(More faithless he than many an untaught clown,)
Has waited long for one who should conceive
Her gentle nature best, and thus inweave
All maiden graces in the woman's crown.

Not until now has the interpreter
Appeared. No other eyes than ours have seen
Verona's constant Julia as she seemed.
To thee was given the skill to plead in her
The cause of hapless maids with fervor keen.
Before of Julia we had merely dreamed !

HIGH-WATER MARK.

ONE glorious day gleams through my memory still,
 Though lagging years have come and gone erewhile ;
 That day whereon I seemed to reconcile
My aspirations with myself, to thrill
With noblest ardor and to feel no chill
 Of low-born aim nor motive, nor the vile
 Persuasions of my baser self beguile
My soul from resolution pure to ill.

My soul may never mount so high again,
 And never may my sluggish spirit glow
 With feeling free as then from all alloy :
But yet should this be bitter truth, the pain
 Is deadened when within my heart I know
 That I rose once and burned with highest joy !

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